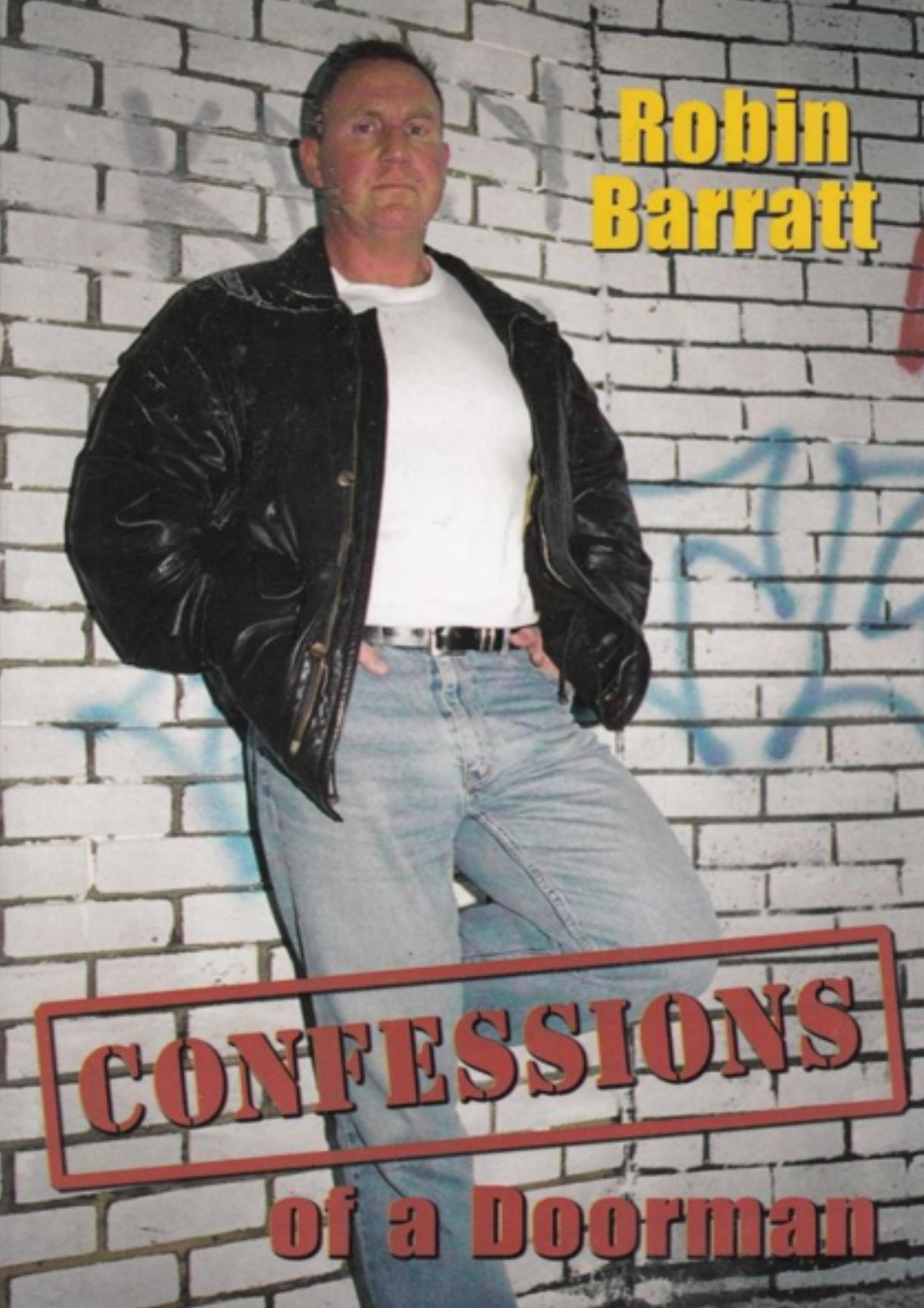
Robin
Barratt
CONFESSIONS
of a Doorman

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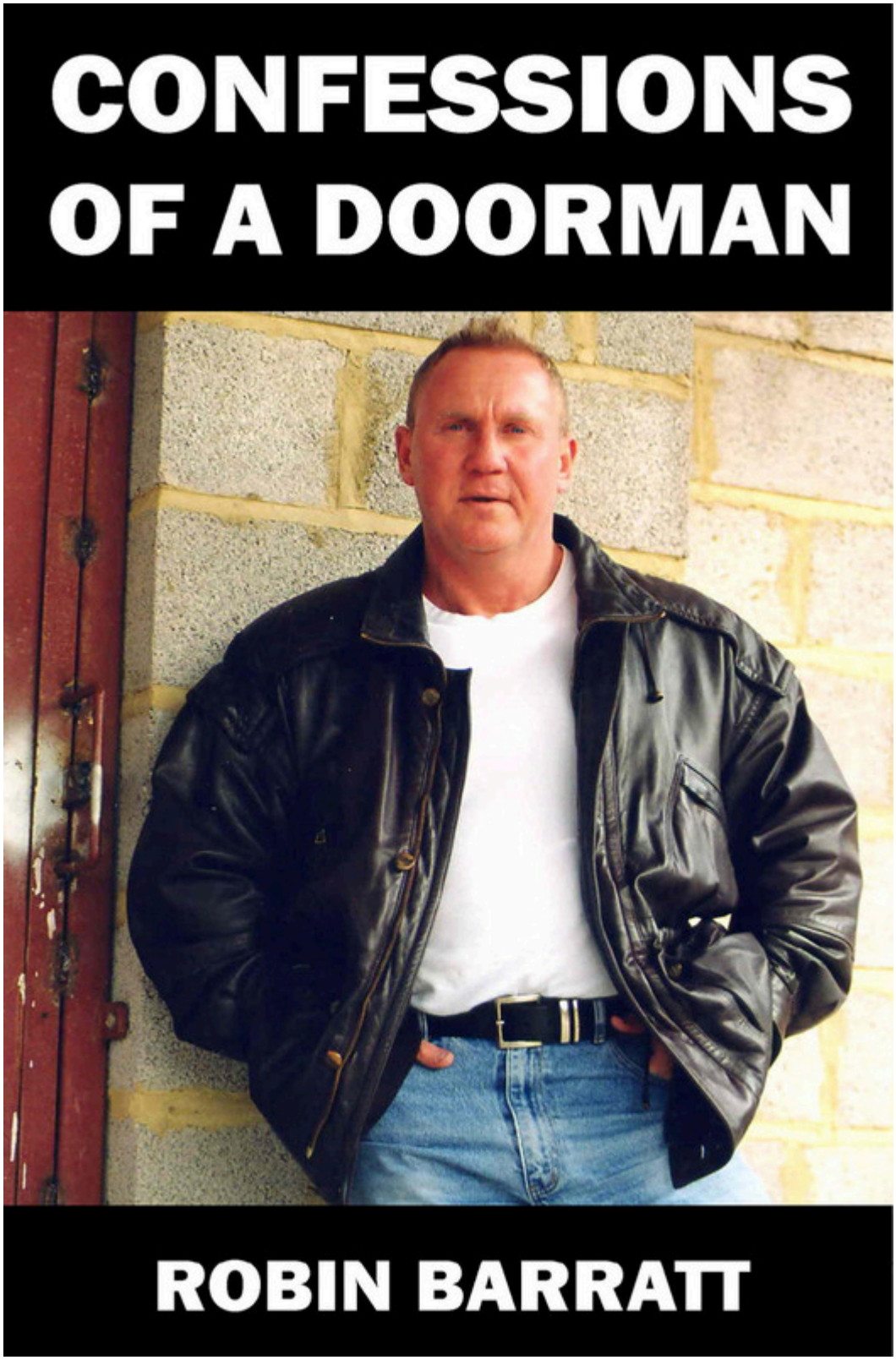

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CONFESSIONS OF A DOORMAN
By
Robin Barratt
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About the Author

Robin Barratt is probably one of the most well-known nightclub bouncers and bodyguards in Great Britain. He started his career in security and protection in the 1980s on the doors in his home town of Norwich and went on to work the doors in towns and cities across the UK including London and Manchester, and even ran the doors of a club in Paris, France. He then attended a six-week Close Protection training course in Hereford, England, and ended up travelling the world looking after the rich (but not so famous). He eventually became the International Director of Training for the Worldwide Federation of Bodyguards up until the year 2000 when it was sold in to an Icelandic subsidiary of Securitas.

Robin started writing in 2002 and in 2004 published his first book Doing the Doors, which is now a genre best-seller. For a while he also published and edited Protection News for the close protection community, The Circuit, an online magazine for the British Bodyguard Association, and On The Doors, the only quality magazine in the world dedicated exclusively to Door Supervision.

As a former doorman and bodyguard, ex-mercenary and martial arts expert, Robin's life has been a series of unbelievable highs and appalling lows; he has experienced the extremes of violence and aggression, been shot at and stabbed and has metered out enough beatings to last a life-

time. Now, after almost twenty years on the front-line dealing with drunks and yobs, gangsters and gangs, he has ‘retired’ from door-work and only does the occasional bodyguarding contract, and is instead concentrating on his writing career as well as developing his new combat and tactical defense academy which sees him is training individuals, security guards, protection specialists, security companies, police and military units worldwide. Robin is currently living in the Middle East.

Author’s Note:

This story is mostly based on events as and when they happened, although in some cases names have had to be invented or changed, and situations and dates altered. There are also some great doorwomen working in the industry, but for ease the term ‘doorman’ and ‘doormen’ have been used to represent both doormen and doorwomen.

Introduction

Confessions of a Doorman was first published as a paperback in 2006. It was my second book after Doing the Doors. However, even though this Kindle version is published six years later, I have kept the book's original format and text as much as possible, and only changed a few minor things where I think most appropriate or necessary.

Unlike Doing the Doors, Confessions of a Doorman isn’t meant to be purely autobiographical. Instead it chronicles some interesting experiences during my career working the doors, and as a bodyguard in France, the Ukraine and Russia, as well as recounting a few wonderfully fascinating and unique stories from colleagues and friends I have both worked and trained with over the years.

Also, even though things have developed considerably within the security industry over the past six years, for posterity I have kept my original strong and often controversial views on the industry in the UK, and the laws that affected door supervisors, as well as detailing my original thoughts and feelings regarding the Security Industry Authority (SIA). At that time I was one of a very few people who were actually prepared to be outspoken and critical of the security industry and the SIA and, unlike those that relied on the industry and the Authority for a living, I was able to tell it as it is and speak my mind. Ironically, as this Kindle edition is released, there is now talk of disbanding the SIA!

As I hope I did with Doing the Doors, I still want to give those interested in the security industry and this genre of literature, a glimpse of what our world on the doors (and as a bodyguard) is really like. Contrary to popular belief, we are not all twenty stone, muscular, tattooed, shaven-headed thugs, whose sole purpose is to ‘bounce’ punters

out of a nightclub. Mostly we are professionals that enjoy the work we do, the environment in which we work and take pride in protecting our customers against the large number of knobheads and arseholes whose only purpose in life is to cause hardship, aggravation and trouble to the innocent. Looking back over my life as a doorman, ninety percent of the time I have thoroughly enjoyed the work I have done and have almost always looked forward to the evening ahead. Of course, like any job, there are times when work becomes tedious and boring, or that you crave for a change - just for a while - but generally my life on the door has been a relatively good life and a life like no other. Working the doors may not be mentally challenging and the job still doesn't command much status or respect with the general public, but there are few jobs where a typical evening could have you dealing with gangsters and gangs, drunks and drug dealers, female 'cat-fights' and male jealousy rages, medical emergencies, fire evacuations, thieves, dishonest bar staff and customer complaints. Although you really did have a bum deal if they all took place in one evening.

Lastly, due to requests and feedback from readers after publishing Doing the Doors, I have also included stories from my life as a bodyguard, specifically in Russia. I have always had an unpredictable, temperamental love/hate relationship with the country and its people, but I adore talking about it and it thrills me when I hear from those who are equally fascinated by this strange and hostile place. Confessions of a Doorman should really have been called Confessions of a Doorman with a few Confessions of a Bodyguard too. Or perhaps not...

In Pain

'How's the pain now?' the nurse asked.

I am lying in the back of the ambulance, staring up at Sophie, my nurse, and the male paramedic, who are both staring anxiously back down at me.

I am forty-three years old, forty-eight hours earlier on the 14th November 2005 on the way home from the gym, I had a heart attack and, because of complications I was on my way to a specialist cardiac unit at Papworth Hospital.

'Number five,' I said, lying. When I was first admitted to hospital I was told to gauge any pain I experienced on a scale from one to ten, one being mild discomfort and ten the worst pain I had ever experienced. I wasn't exactly sure what the worst pain I have ever experienced was, but I wasn't telling the whole truth when I told Sophie the pain I had in my chest was a number five - it was probably seven or maybe even an eight.

I always thought I could take a fair amount of pain; I have certainly had my fair share of brawls and have been battered and bashed a number of times over the course of my relatively short life - on the streets, on the doors and in the dojo. Taking a piss a few weeks after shagging an African hooker sans condom rates pretty high on the pain scale too, and my experiences during the resistance to interrogation at an SAS bodyguard training course I attended many, many years earlier taught me what real hurt was like, but laying there staring into Sophie's pretty blue eyes, I could not even remotely recall the type and level of pain I had previously experienced. I could only remember that it hurt, but the pain I was experiencing in the back of the ambulance was horrible and seemed to get worse with every breath I took and jolt of the vehicle as it braked and weaved its way through rush-hour traffic. Sophie looked down at me suspiciously. I didn't like to complain about pain but, having been in Sophie's care more or less since being first admitted, she now knew to add on an extra couple of numbers to whatever I told her.

I was strapped tightly to the short and far too narrow stretcher with my legs hanging over the far end and my shoulders squeezed and bunched tightly between the metal rails. I was sure that at any moment the rails were going to explode off their fragile hinges slicing Sophie and the paramedic into pieces - like the scene in director Paul Anderson's excellent Resident Evil which I had watched a few days earlier, when the elite commando team were sliced to pieces by the laser while trying to enter 'the Hive'. Brilliant movie, I thought.

My chest was bare except for a flimsy blanket placed over me to keep out the cold November evening. I was attached to numerous electrodes that led up to a small heart monitor balancing precariously on the shelf above me. Personally I had never been in the back of an ambulance - although that wasn't exactly true for a small number of my opponents - and had always thought they were full of high-tech wizardry and flashing multi-coloured lights but, looking round at the stark interior, it appeared to me that ambulances were just big white empty boxes whose sole purpose was to get the patient to a hospital as quickly as possible.

We were 'blue lighting' from Norwich to Papworth Hospital, East Anglia's specialist cardiac unit near Cambridge. I lay staring up at Sophie listening to the wailing sirens and the occasional blast of the horn alongside the muffled curse of the driver as some idiot on the road didn't move out of the way. Sophie gently fiddled with the cannula in my hand, pumping more morphine into my bloodstream. I smiled weakly to myself

as I thought about what this would have been like had it happened in Moscow a month or so earlier.

Health care in Russia hovers between the diabolical and the horrendous, depending upon the amount of cash you have on you at the time. The majority of Russia's hospitals are dreadful and, of all the places I have been, I think Moscow is the only place in the world where no-one moves out of the way for an ambulance. I remember walking down Tverskaya - Moscow's equivalent to London's Oxford Street - and noticing an ambulance, with its sirens screaming and blasting its horn, sitting in a line of stationary traffic at a set of traffic lights. The couple in the car in front chatted aimlessly to each other, smoking, laughing and occasionally glancing back without a care in the world. Although there was space to manoeuvre out of its way, they had no intention of letting the ambulance through and therefore possibly losing their precious space in the queue. I wanted to storm over to the car, bang hard on their window and tell them to fucking move 'or else'. At best I would have been ignored - possibly because I didn't speak much Russian and they wouldn't have understood a word I said- and at worst I might have been shot. But most likely I would have been arrested by a corrupt policeman seizing an opportunity to extort money from a slightly crazed foreigner. As I watched the frustrated and angry ambulance driver, and the indifference of the driver and passenger in the car in front, I wished with all my heart that the ambulance was on its way to someone close and dear to them who would be dead by the time the ambulance arrived.

Sophie smiled down at me.

Two days earlier I had been training at Bodytronics gym on Oak Street in Norwich and had decided to finish the session with ten minutes on the solarium. It was a good workout, I didn't train any harder than normal, nor was I lifting any heavier, it was just a normal regular routine of super-setting chest with back and super-setting biceps with triceps. I had been training like this on and off for years, hard but not too heavy with the priority being to get myself fitter and leaner rather than stronger and bigger. My training was the same week in week out; day one I would train chest, back, biceps and triceps, the next day shoulders, traps, legs and abs and then I would take two days off. I would almost always try to train fairly hard and quick, going straight from one set to the next without pause or rest. I hated aerobic exercise machines such as the stationary bike, rower, step-up and jogger and so super-setting seemed the best option for keeping relatively fit.

I suppose I did feel a little more out of breath than usual and had struggled with my normal routine, but I just put it down to being a little tired. It is virtually impossible for anyone to consistently train hard day after day, week after week and I thought I just needed a rest. After my workout and the ten minutes on the solarium, I sat in the reception area waiting for my wife Inna to get changed. Like me, she also enjoyed working-out and almost always accompanied me to the gym. As I waited, hot and sweaty and still a little out of breath, I felt something was not quite right but shrugged it off as one of those days when my body needed a break from exercise and the gym. As I struggled to concentrate on the magazine in front of me I promised myself I would take a few days off from the dumbbells and barbells.

The gym was a twenty minute brisk walk from our apartment. We didn't have a car. A few months earlier, on the first of July, 2005, Inna and I had gone to Moscow on a three month contract with The Olive Group. The Olive Group operates primarily in high risks zones around the world and mainly employs ex British Special Forces 22 SAS. They have a huge presence in Iraq providing high-risk protection, security convoys, security training and consultancy to the foreign corporate community. My task for those three months was to provide a detailed analysis of the security industry in Russia as well as provide security, protection and consultancy as and when required. The day before we left for Moscow we returned the borrowed old Astra to it's owners. Since we returned from Moscow, Inna and I had reluctantly got used to walking everywhere or catching the bus, but I swore that as soon as I got my last months' salary from Olive I would be buying a car. However, until then, walking briskly backwards and forwards to the gym would be good aerobic exercise and we grudgingly viewed it as a little extra fitness training at the beginning and end of every workout.

We had nodded a silent goodbye to Shaun - the owner of the gym - and to a couple of guys I knew that were still training, and started our brisk walk home. I wasn't really with it - the slight breathlessness I had noticed in the gym didn't seem to go away and I felt a bit strange. I became aware of a mild nagging pain in my chest which seemed to spread down my left arm and up into the lower part of my neck. My arm felt awkward and uncomfortable and I shook it thinking it was just muscle fatigue or slight cramp. At first the pain around my chest wasn't intense and I thought it was just a pulled muscle but, as we continued briskly walking it seemed to get worse with each and every step. Inna immediately noticed that something was wrong.

‘Are you feeling all right?’ she asked, looking a little concerned.

I told her that actually I wasn’t feeling too good but added casually, ‘but I’ll be okay.’ I just wanted to get home where I could lie down and rest a while.

As we continued to walk the pain grew more and more intense; the weight in my chest deepened and my breathlessness intensified. We slowed and slowed until we were quite literally walking at a snail’s pace, each tiny step an ordeal and each breath shorter and harder to take. Inna, carrying my training bag, walked slowly next to me propping me upright a little. She looked more and more troubled as I struggled for breath and tried to ignore the crushing pain in my chest. Finally, I knew I couldn’t go any further and, as I tried to gather my thoughts and recover a little, stopped and sat on a nearby wall.

I could see the corner of our apartment block fifty yards away at the end of the road. After a couple of minutes sitting precariously on the wall, with Inna hovering nervously by my side, I felt I had recovered enough to try and struggle on a little bit further, but after just a few more short steps, I had to stop again and slumped to the floor, only yards from our front door. I curled up on the pavement clutching my chest thinking to myself if only I could crawl the last few yards home where I could rest and recover, everything would be fine.

I knew that obviously something wasn’t right but I still underestimated what was happening and I certainly didn’t think I was having a heart attack. How could I be? I was only forty-three years old, I was fit and healthy, none of my family had had heart attacks, and I didn’t smoke or drink. Of course it wasn’t a heart attack; it was just a severe case of indigestion.

But Inna, who as a student had once spent a summer working alongside her grandmother who was a nurse at a local hospital, seemed to know exactly what it was.

I hate being ill and I hated even more the fact that I was lying on the pavement by the side of the road whinging and whining like some stupid foolish wimp. But I couldn’t get up - something had taken hold of me and had complete control over my body, and I felt totally unable to do anything about it.

Inna threatened to call an ambulance and demanded my mobile phone. The last thing I wanted was to see an ambulance so, being as stubborn as I can sometimes be, I summed up enough energy to insist that I’d be okay and please not to call. However Inna, being as stubborn

as she can sometimes be, totally ignored me and frantically dialled 911. There was no tone.

'Why doesn't it work?' she shouted hysterically down to me. She tried again. 'There is no tone, why isn't it working?' she cried.

'What number are you dialling?' I asked weakly.

'911.'

'It's 999,' I said.

From my almost foetal position amongst the muck and wet leaves I cringed as I heard Inna ask the operator for an ambulance. After a second or two I listened as she explained to the operator that she thought I was having a heart attack. As she was speaking I noticed a car pull up and stop next to where I was laying. I heard someone jump out, a door bang and a voice asking Inna if I was all right. He quickly offered to take me to the hospital. Inna hung up after telling the operator that we would make our own way there.

Although I was almost seventeen stone, Inna and the stranger lifted me up from the floor and carefully placed me into the back of his tiny car. I meekly protested but, as seemed to be the fashion that afternoon, I was aptly ignored. So much for my strength of character and strong will, I thought to myself as I was squeezed into the back seat.

Although clearly unwell I felt stupid and pathetic and sat quietly as the stranger made a mad dash to the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, about three miles away. I was still struggling for breath and tried to focus on the repetitive click-click of his hazards, occasionally glancing up to see him driving frantically down the wrong side of the road and swerving in and out of oncoming traffic.

Strangely, by the time we arrived I was actually feeing a lot better. The pain had subsided and I could breathe easily again. I managed to get out of the car on my own and stand upright. Feeling a little embarrassed at what had just happened - I still didn't believe it was a heart attack and thought that maybe it was indigestion after all. The stranger rushed to the entrance to get a wheel-chair but I said I didn't need one and, after thanking him profusely, we slowly made our way to the Accident and Emergency reception desk.

Once inside I was quite happy to wait in the queue behind an elderly couple and a man with a cut arm but in typically Russian fashion Inna rushed forward, butted in and told the receptionist she thought I had just had a heart attack. The receptionist told me to walk round the corner where I was instantly met by another nurse who immediately pushed me

straight down into a wheel-chair and rushed me directly into the emergency care unit.

Inna stayed behind at reception to fill out the necessary admission forms.

In the cubicle I clumsily wiggled onto the bed and took off my training top. One of the male nurses looked at me and immediately commented: ‘You are a big guy.’

I wasn’t sure whether he fancied me, whether he was just being polite and striking up conversation, or whether there was another more sinister reason for his comments.

‘Yes, I do a little training,’ I replied modestly ‘actually, I was on my way home from the gym when this happened,’ I added, justifying my sweaty t-shirt and trainers.

‘I can see you’re a bodybuilder and work-out,’ he confirmed. ‘You might not like this but I am going to have to ask you one question.’

My heart sank. I immediately knew what he was going to ask. I briefly thought about lying, of saying I have never used steroids in my life and these seventeen stones were carved from years and years of toil and shear hard work, Creatine powder, vitamin supplements and natural whey protein but, after a brief pause, anticipating his question about steroid use I said; ’I know what you are going to ask.’

Apart from a 500 to 600mg shot of testosterone each and every week for the past couple of years, I genuinely had not used anabolics for quite a long while, mainly because I had struggled to make ends meet let alone afford to buy myself drugs. Actually I couldn’t remember the last time I had used actual anabolics, it was probably well before I lived in Moscow and that was almost three years ago. And even then I only took a few pink methandrostenalone (Dianabol) tablets a day which I had bought quite cheaply mail-order from Thailand. Over the past two or three years I had been fairly content with injecting three ampoules of 100mg of Viromone twice a week - literally a pain in the arse but it seemed to work really well. I didn’t get big and I didn’t get strong but I did maintain quite a good shape, plus it worked wonders for the libido (ahem!). Also, about three months prior to finding myself horizontal in that hospital bed, I suppose had used a little Sustanon too - it was early July, we had just arrived in Moscow and I asked Inna to ask local chemists near to where we were living whether they sold testosterone, which she happily did. I didn’t fancy spending the summer in Moscow without any ‘gear.’ Money talks in Russia and it was the second or third chemist that agreed to sell me genuine Organon Sustanon imported

directly from Holland. I had to pay the equivalent of about £4 an ampoule - which was about half the price of genuine black market Organon in the UK. They even kindly sold me needles and syringes for the equivalent of about 5 pence each. I was in bodybuilding heaven; I had found a regular supplier of testosterone just five minutes walk from my front door! And so, throughout the summer, I suppose I did take 500mg of Sustanon as well as 100mg of Viromone each and every week, which wasn't much in bodybuilding terms, but was a lot in nursing-a-possible-heart-attack-because-of-drugs terms. But apart from that, I hadn't taken anything else... ish.

I suppose I could have got away with lying to the doctors but I decided that if this was indeed a heart attack I should at least be relatively honest with the people who were going to be in charge of my health, and indeed my life, for the next few hours. If I was to receive the best care possible and get home, I thought I should be as truthful and honest as possible and tell it exactly as it was.

'Yes, I've used steroids. I used to compete in weight-lifting many years ago, but I have not used them for quite a long while.....only a little testosterone.'

'How long ago did you last use them?' the nurse asked with his pen hovering threateningly over my file.

'Umm,' I thought for a few seconds, 'I have not taken anything for years,' I paused for a few more seconds, 'probably about ten years ago.' He scribbled as I lied. OK, I was going to be truthful, but not that truthful.

'And then how long had you been using them?' he asked, sternly.

'On and off since I was twenty-something.' He scribbled some more. I was desperate to see what he had written.

Telling him I was a steroid-user made me feel a little awkward and slightly embarrassed. Most people still have an extremely negative opinion towards steroids and the use of drugs in sport and most people still refuse to believe that almost every single athlete, from County level upwards, probably uses or has used some form of muscle building substance at some time during their athletic career, even if the athlete is regularly tested and the tests are negative (for the educated athlete it is relatively simple to pass drug tests). Occasionally an athlete does get tested positive and is subsequently banned, but this is only because the athlete has been particularly careless with his or her specific medication and timings, and not because they were the only ones in the competition

taking drugs. They were just the unlucky ones in a line-up full of steroid users.

There are many very short acting anabolic steroids on the market which an athlete can take up to just a few days before to a competition and still pass a drugs test. The key is to know exactly what type of product to use, its life-span in the body and how to effectively cycle it with other products for the best results.

Basically athletes use two categories of drugs: hormones, such as testosterone, and anabolic steroids. For optimum results it is better to use a combination of the two as they both work on the body in different ways. Testosterone is an androgen. Androgens were first discovered in 1936 and is the term used for any natural or synthetic compound that stimulates or controls the development and maintenance of masculine characteristics. This includes the development of male secondary sex characteristics, and muscle mass is a major male characteristic. As opposed to catabolic compounds which break down molecules, anabolic steroids are a class of natural and synthetic compounds that promote cell growth - resulting in the growth of several types of tissues, especially muscle. Different anabolic steroids have varying combinations of androgenic and anabolic properties, and an athlete would carefully choose his or her product depending upon the desired effect and the athlete's specific goals. For example, athletes that require a huge amount of strength and mass - for example weightlifters - will take massive amounts of the androgenic compound testosterone, alongside other high androgenic, low anabolic compounds such as Dianabol and Anapolon. Athletes that require strength but less mass - for example shot putters - will still use testosterone but alongside classic muscle-building compounds such as Deca Durabolin which has medium androgenic and anabolic properties. Athletes that require less strength but more endurance and quality, leaner muscle will take low androgen, high anabolic compounds such as Primobolan and Anavar. Athletes also frequently use other compounds including Growth Hormone, IGF1 and Insulin, which is a thousand times more anabolic than the strongest anabolic steroid currently on the market.

All compounds, whether anabolic or androgenic, have a specific life span in the body and all can be detected in drug tests. However, some drugs can be detected months or even years after use, while others are completely undetectable after just a few days. Professional competitive athletes will know which compounds to take, for how long and the detectable time frame for drugs tests. And most athletes are given weeks,

if not months, notice of impending tests so they can easily cycle their consumption according to the test and competition dates. It is not easy, but in my opinion effective steroid use is part and parcel of being a competitive athlete. Those that get it wrong get caught and those that get caught then vigorously deny any form of drug use and those that vigorously deny drug use are generally lying - in my opinion every single athlete at some time in their careers has used some form of chemical enhancement. But of course it is not the athletes who are to blame; they should not be condemned. It is the general public. The public expects, no demands an extremely high level of competition and it is no longer possible for the human body to constantly perform at such extreme levels without some form of chemical assistance. Yet the public abhor steroid use and athletes that are caught are publicly hanged. Footballers, rugby players, swimmers, field athletes, weight-lifters, cyclists, rowers; chemicals and drugs have been used in almost every sport by almost every athlete.

In June 2005, just before I left for Moscow I remembered reading about the French footballer Christophe Dugarry who was tested positive for steroids and consequently banned, but I knew of premiership footballers taking anabolic steroids and testosterone years ago. Christophe was not in the minority; he was part of the majority but was just unlucky.

Steroids will never be accepted and will always be taboo and I felt strangely embarrassed admitting my steroid use to the nurse.

‘Do you have a family history of heart attacks?’ he asked.

I thought for a few seconds and replied, ‘Not really heart attacks, but both grandparents died of strokes. Oh yes, my grandmother died from a heart attack after she had eventually recovered from cancer. And my mother had a mild stroke when she was about sixty.’ I tried to take away the emphasis from steroids. I thought it might help but I could see he was having none of it; my grandparents were all in their mid-eighties when they died, and I was only forty-three.

As he scribbled my replies into my seemingly ever expanding file, another nurse joined us and I was immediately given a large dose of aspirin to reduce the 'stickiness' of the blood. I was told that it also helps to prevent further blood clotting. This humble, cheap, hundred year old drug has literally saved hundreds of thousands of lives in a previously unknown way. It has been shown to help reduce the risk of strokes and heart attacks, to help prevent death and complications from heart attacks, and to help reduce recurring blockages for those who have had heart

bypass surgery or other procedures to clear blocked arteries. It seemed ironic that millions of aspirin tablets are now used around the world each and every day and yet, during the 1920s Bayer, the manufacturers of aspirin, apparently proudly claimed in their advertising campaigns that aspirin had no effect what-so-ever on the heart. If only they knew...

My blood pressure was taken and I was given oxygen. I was feeling a lot better - I just wanted to go home and not lay there like a right twat with an oxygen mask covering my face.

While the nurse made a few more notes (I wondered how much more there was to write about me), a female doctor entered along with an A & E cardiac technician who started to connect electrodes to my chest, arms, and ankles. As twelve electrodes were being attached to various locations on my body the doctor introduced herself as Lydmilla and she was Russian. She proudly told me that this was her very first day on the Accident and Emergency Ward and I was her very first patient. I gulped as I thought about the terrible state of the Russian health service and the indifference of the staff and wondered whether she would be demanding a few extra roubles for a little extra care and attention. The doctor looked up at the monitor as my heart rate increased significantly as I realised I didn't have any roubles on me.

The nurse said to the doctor: 'Robin Barratt, forty-three years old, possible MI (myocardial infarction or heart attack) previous anabolic steroid use...'

I meekly looked down at my twiddling thumbs.

I knew heart attacks killed thousands of people each and every year but I didn't quite realise the number. According to the British Heart Foundation there are about 268,000 heart attacks in the UK each and every year. Heart and circulatory disease is Britain's biggest killer. In 2002, cardiovascular disease (CVD) caused thirty nine percent of all deaths, and killed almost 238,000 people. Coronary heart disease (CHD), the main form of CVD, causes over 117,000 deaths a year. Smoking caused around 30,000 deaths in 2000 in the UK, and it is said that exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of CHD by around twenty-five percent. It is terribly wrong and completely unjust that thousands of people die every year because of the smoke of others and I hope the government decides to ban smoking in all public places as they propose.

I did smoke for about one week when I was nineteen years old whilst living and working in France as a campsite courier. I wanted to be 'cool' like I thought all French people were. I bought some tobacco and

cigarette papers from a local tabac and sat on my own on a park bench and fumbled my first roll-up. Just as I had drummed up enough courage to take that first drag, a pretty French girl sat next to me on the same bench with her poodle nestled snugly in her lap. I did think about stubbing out the glowing roll-up on the floor and ending my smoking days before they even started but, with this pretty girl sitting inches from me and my desire to be as cool as cool could be, I lifted my pretentious head in the air and took a long hard drag. Instantly I burst out coughing and spluttering, my face turned a deep red and I almost fell off the bench. The poodle started to growl and bark at me as I struggled to catch my breath. That first embarrassing day didn't seem to put me off as I coughed and wheezed and spluttered foolishly for a week trying to be 'cool.' But after I almost lost my voice, stunk like a pig and alienated most of my friends, I eventually gave smoking up as a bad job.

Could that have been the cause of my heart attack? For most of my life I had worked in smoky pubs and clubs so in theory smoking had increased the risk twenty-five percent, but did it therefore mean that everybody that worked in pubs or nightclubs ran the risk of having heart disease? From glass collectors to General Managers, were they all at risk? Could having a heart attack now be listed alongside lung cancer as a job related risk for those working in the licensed industry?

High cholesterol and diabetes are also big killers and unhealthy diets and obesity make up around thirty percent of deaths. And around five percent was due to alcohol. But steroid use? Maybe, just maybe, one or two people die every year from heart attacks which could perhaps directly be attributed to heavy and prolonged steroid use, but there were no actual verifiable statistics. Steroids cause muscle growth, the heart is a muscle so surely steroids would make the heart stronger and more efficient rather than causing damage? And why did I feel guilty about telling the nurse that I used steroids when they actually affect a minuscule, insignificant number of people?

Also, apart from an occasional glass of red wine with my evening meal, I hadn't drunk much either, and apart from that week in France I didn't smoke, and apart from an occasional monstrous piece of Marks and Spencer creamy lemon cheesecake, I thought I ate pretty well and would always have either salad or vegetables with almost every meal. I took loads of vitamins and minerals and I trained hard at least four times a week. Generally I thought I led a pretty healthy lifestyle - there seemed to be no other risk factor apart from the influence years of steroid use had had.

‘Are you taking any steroids now?’ the doctor asked.

‘Just a little bit of testosterone every week,’ I replied casually, wondering whether I had been magically transported back to Russia - I was being questioned by a Russian doctor while my Russian wife was waiting for me in reception. Bizarre!

‘Although there is no actual physical evidence that testosterone can cause heart attacks,’ she said in that oh-so-familiar sexy Russian accent, ‘it is a fact that more men have heart attacks than women and there are rarely any women of your age admitted.’ If that was her very first day on the ward, and I was her very first patient, how did she know that? But I decided not to question her. ‘And’ she continued harshly, ‘men have the hormone testosterone and women don’t....’ she ended, allowing me to figure out the rest of the sentence for myself. I nodded in agreement, not understanding a word she had just said.

The technician asked me to lie completely still while he took an electrocardiogram (ECG) reading. I asked what an ECG was and he told me it is used to discover different types of heart disease by measuring the electrical activity of the heart. The signals that make the heart's muscle fibres contract come from the sinoatrial node, which is the natural pacemaker of the heart. In an ECG test, the electrical impulses made through the electrodes while the heart is beating are recorded and shown on a piece of paper. An ECG records any problems with the heart's rhythm and can be used, amongst other things, to assess if the patient has had a heart attack or evidence of a previous heart attack.

‘Oh!’ I said not understanding a word he said either. It wasn’t my day.

After a few seconds I could hear the paper being torn from the machine. The doctors and nurses all looked at it and all confirmed that I had indeed had a heart attack, but it wasn’t a major attack and there didn’t seem to be too much heart damage. I was told I would have to have further blood tests for a more detailed analysis and I would probably need to stay a few nights for observation and monitoring.

I was immediately given a thrombolysis, an injection of 'clot busting' medication which, the doctor said, would 'dissolve' any blood clot. She told me the sooner this is given after a heart attack the better it is, as the part of the heart muscle starved of blood does not die immediately, and if blood flow is restored within a few hours much of the heart muscle that would have been damaged will survive.

‘Get that thrombolysis into me,’ I thought to myself as they fiddled with the cannula and pumped a syringe full of clear liquid into my veins.

So it seemed that I wasn't going to get back home to my comfortable little apartment and my computer screen and my chocolate chip cookies and Twinning tea after all. I was pissed off and I felt guilty - I had too much to do to be lying bored and restless in a hospital bed.

I felt even more guilty as an elderly frail looking porter arrived and started wheeling my seventeen stone bulk the short distance to the Coronary Care Unit 'Hopefully it wasn't too far', I thought to myself, 'otherwise it might be me wheeling him back into the Emergency Room'. I was sure I heard a deep sigh of relief as he locked my bed into position. I thanked him generously; if he had been Russian I would have definitely thrown a handful of roubles his way. As he limped off clutching his lower back I was told by a smiling staff nurse that I would definitely be staying for a few days.

'Roughly how long?' I asked meekly.

'Normally heart attack patients have to stay at least five days,' the nurse replied, 'but we will see how you feel and what your blood tests show. The cardiologist will discuss this with you.'

The degree of the heart attack can be gauged by the amount of a substance called Troponin released into the bloodstream. An accurate measurement can only be obtained twelve hours after a heart attack, so I wouldn't know the results until early the following morning. An average person's normal Troponin level is around 0.01. A major heart attack can be fifty, a life threatening attack up to one hundred.

I was attached to a heart monitor blinking red and green above my bed and drugs were intravenously pumped into the cannula in my left hand. Surprisingly I was feeling much better but because this had all happened on the way home from the gym I felt sweaty and dirty and my clothes were a little muddy and damp from when I was curled up on the pavement. I desperately wanted a shower but I was tersely told that I couldn't go anywhere or do anything for at least twenty-four hours. A threatening looking water bottle was ceremoniously placed on the table and I was instructed to call the nurse who would bring a commode should I feel the need to do anything bigger. As I lay on the bed I silently wished I could have crawled back home where I felt sure that, after a shower and rest, everything would have been just fine.

It is said that in emergency situations relatives and friends fear and worry more than the actual patient and, when Inna finally arrived on the ward, she seemed a lot more distressed than I was. I reassuringly told her not to worry and that I was feeling much better. The pain had almost gone; just a little discomfort remained akin to being thumped in the

chest. I somehow knew that this wasn't life threatening, that it wasn't yet my time to depart this ugly world.

'I suppose you had better call my mother,' I said to Inna as she stood over my bed, holding my hand looking down at me with sad tearful eyes. I really wished I was some place else. Had I been told that I would be going home the following day I doubt I would have called my mother, but because it looked as though I would be in hospital for a few days at least, it would have been unkind and wrong of me not to.

'Just tell her I am fine, that there is nothing to worry about and that I will be out of hospital soon' I said. I could imagine that it wasn't going to be a particularly nice conversation.

Inna nodded, took my phone from her bag and made her way to the corridor outside - using mobile phones in the cardiology ward was strictly prohibited. While she went off to make that 'your-son's-had-a-heart-attack' call I looked around at the walls of my room and at the machines and drips I was connected to and wondered what the fuck was I doing there.

Up until that point, apart from an occasional nurse in my bed and the odd trip to the Genito-Urinary Medical Clinic, I had very little contact with hospitals or the Heath Service. I also generally ignored most television programs and news articles lamenting and complaining about the poor state of the NHS and the appalling standard of care and cleanliness found in most hospitals. It had always seemed to me that everyone and his dog complained about the National Health Service, but as I lay in the Coronary Care Unit I knew I would and could never receive better care anywhere else in the world. From the consultants to the cleaners, without exception, everyone was friendly, sympathetic, caring and kind. I had nothing to complain about. However the only thing I would have changed were the strange noises the elderly cleaner made as she brushed and mopped my room and around my bed. She was farting like a trooper and with each fart followed a hushed, 'Ooops' or a muffled camouflaging cough. I closed my eyes and tried to pretend I was sleeping, desperately trying not to burst out laughing but, as a giant one was released when she reached up to dust the ledge above the monitor, I opened my eyes in horror. She looked down at me and smiled a toothless smile as though nothing had happened. But apart from the farting cleaner, the care I received was perfect.

After staying close by my bedside making sure I was comfortable and settled, Inna finally took a taxi home. The rest of that evening was pretty uneventful, as I watched television and read, the lovely nurses

came and went taking blood, checking my blood pressure and temperature, fiddling with my drip and reading the monitor above my head. It was then that I was introduced to Sophie. Sophie was gorgeous and, as I was told she was going to be in charge of my care throughout my stay, a broad smile appeared over my ugly face.

Inna returned early the following morning and stayed by my bedside all day. My very worried looking mother and her even more worried looking husband came, stayed a while and left, and my brother also managed to take a couple hours off work to visit. I felt awkward and uncomfortable and tried the best I could to dismiss the obvious worries and concerns they all had. I was feeling fine; I had no more chest pains and I just wanted to be released from the tangle of cords and wires that kept me prisoner to my bed and to the monitor. I also needed a refreshing shower and a giant crap - as I was definitely never ever going to use the commode.

My consultant, cardiologist Doctor Graham-Clarke, arrived late in the afternoon and confirmed once again that I had indeed had a heart attack. She said it was fairly significant but not major; my Troponin levels measured twelve. However, as far as they could determine, there was no obvious cause of the attack and it seemed my heart was generally strong and fairly healthy. For the time being, she said, my condition would be managed medically and I would continue to be monitored over the following few days. I breathed a huge sigh of relief and smiled to myself. My heart was not damaged, things were not serious and soon I could get back home and return to my normal life.

Or so I thought.

Inna left around nine that evening, taking the bus to Castle Meadow in the city centre, and then walking for the thirty minutes it took her to get home. I managed to persuade a kind-hearted nurse to unplug me from the monitor so I could do my much needed ablutions. I emerged from the WC with a huge stupid grin on my face as I deposited the mother of all deposits into the hospital sewage system, and showered the previous day's gym and pavement grime from my body. I spent the rest of the evening watching telly and trying to flirt with the nurses that continued to come and go.

I started to feel unwell at about 10pm. I tried to sleep but the pain in my chest grew, pounding away keeping me awake. As the pain grew I became more and more restless and out of breath. With every breath I took the pain seemed to get worse. It wasn't the same pain as I had the day before; it wasn't a heart attack pain but a constant aching, nagging

pain. Although I enjoyed the nurses company I really didn't want to press the buzzer, so I waited as long as I could; changing positions every few minutes trying to get comfortable. When it became too unbearable to keep still I paced the room, backwards and forwards, hoping by some miracle the pain would go away. After two hours I eventually decided I had to call a nurse - it was the very last thing I wanted to do as I knew that if I was experiencing any pain or discomfort they would keep me in hospital even longer.

'Do you have anything to help me sleep?' I asked Sophie sheepishly as she entered my room, 'I have been having pains in my chest for about two hours and it's keeping me awake.'

'Two hours!' she exclaimed, 'you should have told us immediately.' She frantically checked my pulse and my blood pressure, and rushed out for the equipment to take another ECG test. Everybody working on the Coronary Ward is trained in ECG testing. Thankfully, although it wasn't exactly normal and showed some irregularity, it confirmed that I wasn't having another heart attack, but I was in pain. More pain killers were pumped into my veins and after about an hour, with the help of a sleeping tablet, I finally fell asleep.

The following morning, when Sophie asked if I was still experiencing any pain, I lied and said no. But the ECG again confirmed irregularity. I was still in pain but I was trying to hide it as best as I could - I wanted to go home and knew I wouldn't be able to if I continued to tell her I was having problems. It got steadily worse during the day and no matter how much morphine they pumped into my veins it didn't seem to help. At around five in the afternoon a decision was made to rush me to Papworth Specialist Cardiac Unit in Cambridgeshire.

I felt sorry for Inna. She was with me when the decision was made and looked really upset. Papworth was almost eighty miles from Norwich and I felt anxious about how she was going to get there and back - she would have to catch a train to Cambridge and then a bus to Papworth. Although she did have a driver's licence, Inna couldn't actually drive. Like many Russians, after failing her driving-test numerous times she eventually bought a driver's licence from the motor-school for a couple of hundred dollars. She also had to pay quite a few dollars to the local police to endorse the licence. It was a normal trick of driving schools, to consistently fail their students so they would eventually offer extra money to pass. When Inna and I were touring Italy a couple of years previously I asked if she wanted to drive as I was feeling tired - I had driven hundreds of miles that day and wanted a

break. Inna smiled and said, ‘of course’ but, she warned me: it had been a while since she last drove a car. She eagerly jumped out of the passenger side and ran excitedly around the car while I shuffled over into her seat. Motorway driving was tedious and boring and with Inna driving I thought I could have a nice rest and perhaps even a little snooze. As soon as she sat in the driver’s seat I immediately knew something was wrong, especially when she looked down confused and said, ‘What are these pedals for?’ Although she had an International Driver’s Licence and had apparently failed her test four times, she still had no idea what the brake, clutch and accelerator were and didn’t have a clue about the gears. After eventually grinding it into first gear and travelling a few yards down the road with the engine screaming, I shouted ‘Stop’, jumped out of my seat and almost dragged her from hers. Needless to say I didn’t have my well earned rest and peaceful snooze after all.

Just as the decision to send me to Papworth was made, my mother arrived on the ward. She quickly telephoned my brother who agreed to pick Inna up. They would follow behind the ambulance, although he was warned not to try and keep up. After about an hour my things were packed and I was wheeled to the waiting ambulance, its doors open wide beckoning me inside. The ambulance was going to ‘blue light’ it all the way to Papworth, which was the standard procedure for heart attack victims.

As I lay in the back staring up at Sophie and the slightly less attractive (in my eyes anyway) male paramedic I reflected about all the things I had done in my short and hectic life - all the crazy places I had visited and all the crazy people I had met. I’ve been in some rough places, in some of the most horrible environments of the world and have endured some very difficult situations but few people are really ‘hard’ when they’re connected to machines and medication with pain searing through their body. We are all just fragile pieces of flesh at the mercy of those around us who are ultimately responsible for our survival. We are humbled by their care and kindness, no matter who or what we are, or the reasons for us being there.

If only I had known how much worse things were going to get...

Old School Or New School?

A while ago I was asked by an 'old-timer', who had spent years on the doors and was as tough and as hard as anyone in the industry, whether I was ‘old school’ or ‘new school’. Although I understood exactly what he was getting at, I pretended I didn’t and asked him what he meant precisely.

‘Old school,’ he said, was to teach troublemakers a good, hard lesson and to throw them out as quickly as possible using whatever violence was necessary, whenever it was necessary and as much as was necessary. ‘New school,’ he said, was to use little violence, be patient and rely on ‘conflict management skills’, diplomacy, violence evasive techniques ‘and all that bollocks’ to quote his eloquent turn of phrase. He was almost fifty years old and had seen and been involved in more violence on the streets and on the doors than most of us would ever experience in our lifetime. He wasn’t particularly articulate or academic, he had never read a book in his life and kept himself to himself, but he was sharp-witted and quick-fisted and the chances of him adapting to more modern, ‘fashionable’ door-control techniques were about as remote as me turning up on my next nightclub door dressed as a ballerina. He was definitely ‘old school’.

As a kid he had been taught to counter violence with violence, not to be bullied or tormented and to stand up for himself and for what he honestly considered to be right. His father instilled in him a sense of pride, of doing the right thing and of not being taken advantage of. The only way he was taught to counter violent behaviour and an aggressive attitude, was to be even more violent and aggressive in return. He knew no other way and, if there was indeed another way, it was far too late for him to change - if you were pissing about in his club and saw him approaching, you had two choices; 1) stop pissing about or 2) suffer the consequences! And the consequences of his powerful fists slamming into your jaw were terrible; eighteen stone and a lifetime of boxing would quickly send you into oblivion.

Up until the new SIA laws were implemented he had been working at the same nightclub for eight years and rarely had any trouble. Difficulties only came from new customers and ‘out of towners’ - all the regulars knew him, his reputation and his methods, and if you were unlucky enough to have been on the receiving end of his wrath, you quickly learnt your lesson. But he was never a bully and never held a grudge - as long as your behaviour wasn’t excessive and that you hadn’t hurt anyone, he would always let you back in a few weeks later as he knew with almost one hundred percent certainty, that you would never, ever cause trouble at his venue again. He was proud of the fact that his club was one of the safest and most trouble-free in the area. But, since the new laws and licences were implemented he has sadly left the doors.

‘Old school versus new school?’

I have been asked this question many times over the years and, no matter how much I think about it and listen to the arguments for and against both schools of thought, it has always been a question I could never seem to answer.

I can honestly say that personally I really don't like violence. Unlike a few people I know working the doors, I certainly don't get a kick out of being violent, it doesn't 'float my boat' and I would much prefer to live a quiet, peaceful life and not get involved in any sort of trouble. I believe I am fundamentally passive, but when violence is forced upon me and I am then forced to counter it in an aggressive, brutal way, I feel disheartened and saddened and angered at having responded in such a manner. It is therefore inconsistent and a contradiction that I actually passionately believe in both schools of thought.

Contrary to popular belief and contrary to the reputation I seemed to have develop over the years, I am the very last person to start a fight and I will never ever pick on anyone innocent, timid or weak. However, if someone decides to pick a fight with me I must admit I will always be the first to end it, and as aggressively as necessary in order to end it as quickly as possible. I definitely do not believe in rolling around the muddy, grubby floor getting my clothes dirty, trying to fight 'fair'. If, after an initial warning or two to back off, someone still has the intention of picking a fight with me I will, without hesitation, break arms or legs within the first few seconds and walk away happily leaving him (or perhaps her) writhing in agony on the floor. If someone is dim-witted and reckless enough to start trouble then they must be prepared to suffer all the consequences. And if the attacker happens to be a woman? Too bad; I will punch her lights out in an instant. I have seen men scarred and disfigured for life because of the rage of a woman. A friend on the door had his ear bitten off by a drunken female and had to undergo hours of plastic surgery sewing it back on - all because he refused her entry and he was too afraid to strike back when she become violent. Most men - and rightly so - are morally compelled not to hit or hurt women, but if a woman is charging at me in a frenzy intending to do me serious harm, she is going down hard, regardless of whether most people think it is morally wrong.

Over the years working in an industry surrounded by violence, I have come to the conclusion that in most cases people seem to prefer to extend and prolong a fight rather than do whatever is necessary to end it quickly. I have never understood this! It is relatively easy to disarm and disable almost any opponent within the first few seconds of almost any

conflict. There are exceptions, of course, but ninety percent of all street and door conflicts can be terminated within the first few seconds and whether you are a sixteen year old or a sixty year old, it is possible and relatively easy for almost anyone to take out an aggressive opponent's knees, break fingers, a hand or an arm, or bite off a nose or gouge out eyes. Sadly there are only very few people that would consider going to such extremes, which is why people end up beaten or raped, or even killed. The majority of people use their fists in a so-called 'fair' fight but by doing so they actually leave themselves open to hurt and pain. Unless you're really good and really quick - with a power behind a punch to disable almost instantly - then most people will struggle to win, and struggling to win quite possibly means losing, and losing cannot only hurt you physically but can destroy you mentally. Losing a fight takes away all your self-respect and self-esteem. It can literally be life-changing.

Over the years I have known many good doormen; fearless, hard men literally change overnight after one good beating. Paul, a good friend of mine and head doorman of a top club in Manchester city centre in charge of twenty-five other door-staff, never returned to the doors after a severe beating one night after work. He refused entry to someone who wasn't dressed appropriately and heard the same-old boring lines: 'You don't know who I am; I am going to come back and 'do' you.' As doormen we hear this stupid, meaningless, pathetic phrase so many times we almost always shrug our shoulders with boredom and weariness and smile sarcastically, hoping they will quickly scuttle off to a dark corner somewhere and sober up. It happens so often on the doors, if we genuinely believed everyone that threatened us, we wouldn't last a week in the job. But on this particular occasion this person actually did fulfil his promise to return; he waited for Paul nearby until the end of the night. Early morning a few hours later, a street cleaner found Paul unconscious next to his car with severe facial injuries, three broken ribs and a broken arm. He had also lost a lot of blood. It appears that he was beaten up with nothing other than fists. Paul was in hospital for almost two weeks and he never went back to working the doors again. Apparently he is now driving an HGV somewhere, leading a much quieter life.

'Old school versus new school?'

On my travels working on numerous doors around the UK, as well as working as a bodyguard in some hell-holes around the world - places such as the Congo, Bosnia during the conflict, Israel and Russia - I have

met some incredibly hard, tough and occasionally really nasty men - mercenaries in The Congo and in Bosnia, a bare knuckle freestyle fighting champion of Russia, principal self-defence instructors to the Israeli Secret Service and SAS veterans. According to my experience and understanding not one of them has ever once gone out of their way to cause trouble - just for the sake of causing trouble. They, of course, lead incredibly violent and tough lives but they never ever bring this tough life into the public domain. Gangster ‘Heads’ (those at the very top) almost always stay within their own peer group and keep their violent and troubled world confined amongst themselves. Rarely, unless provoked, have I ever seen a ‘head’ cause trouble in public places, pubs or clubs. Most 'heads' would prefer to walk away rather than get involved - but pick a fight with them and you’re limping and drooling for the rest of your life. Real hard men never need to pick on the timid or weak or defenceless. The fact is that real hard men never have to prove themselves. The only people I have ever seen cause trouble are egotistical upstarts, mindless young arseholes who believe they are ‘someone’ they are not, or that they are ‘special’ when they are not. Gangster ‘heads’, mercenaries, bare knuckle champions, self-defence instructors, all generally have a high regard and level of respect for those around them; knobheads and arseholes do not - they care for no-one and nothing.

If provoked admittedly I can be extremely hard and ruthless and I have little compunction in doing whatever I have to in order to completely destroy my opponent. But I definitely don’t like violence and I generally do believe there are usually be much better ways of resolving most difficult situations. And when the crunch comes to the crunch I actually believe most people don’t actually want to fight either; there is always the uncertainty of a possible good beating and even the hardest men are wary of an unknown opponent and have seen the hardest men fall beneath the unlikeliest adversary. In most cases, and for most people, the idea of violence overshadows the reality of actually being violent. Most people believe violence is admirable and exciting and fun until a huge tattooed fist comes crashing into their skull - and then they think maybe it isn’t such a good thing after all.

To be honest with you, I have always been confused and bewildered with the conflicting and contradictory attitudes and beliefs I have had towards the use of violence, as you will see throughout this book where there are a number of contradictions and inconsistencies in my viewpoints. In my opinion I really do believe violent behaviour should

only be used as the very last resort and when there are absolutely no other options available. However, because violence is sadly the first choice for a great many people, I must also truthfully admit that sometimes I just want to kick the shit out of someone whose only intention is to cause trouble, pick on the weak and bully the timid. Sometimes, no often I so want to do to them what they seem so eager and keen to do to others and detest those that have no respect and who care little for anything or anyone apart from their own selfishness and greed. And I hate arsehole so-called 'gangsters' whose world spills over to the general public. If these people kept themselves to themselves then, in my opinion, they can do more-or-less whatever they want, but when they affect other innocent people's lives I feel like chopping them into tiny pieces and flushing them down my toilet.

'Old school versus new school?'

It is a sad and depressing fact that the United Kingdom is becoming more and more violent. According to the British Crime Survey in 2003/4, the total number of violent offences in England and Wales was almost three million. These include almost half a million incidents of domestic violence, almost a million incidents where the offender was an acquaintance, almost a million incidents where the offender was a stranger, and 4,000 incidents of mugging. Violent crime has soared, there are almost three quarters of a million more violent crimes during 2003/4 than in 1983 - the year I first started working the doors. It is a fact that in most major cities ordinary people fear walking the streets late at night. Murders, muggings, rapes and robberies are a daily occurrence and alcohol and 'binge' drinking at appallingly uncontrollable levels. What kind of depraved and sick society are we living in when we are even scared in our own homes? How many times do we read of people being attacked protecting their property and possessions and those they love? At times I have been desperately poor and absolutely destitute but I have never once considered stealing or picking on the defenceless and vulnerable around me. Not once. It is not poverty that drives people to violence and into crime, but a complete disregard and total lack of respect. It is not poverty that litters the streets with graffiti and garbage and turns good neighbourhoods into dilapidated slums, but disrespect. In my opinion, people that disrespect others for their own selfish ends are not human beings but animals and animals should be treated totally differently. As a so-called 'modern', 'civilised' society we all believe we have basic human rights and therefore should be treated accordingly, But in my opinion, scumbag arsehole criminals and knob-head drunks that

are violent and disrespectful and cruel, are not human and so should not be treated as human and therefore should not have any human rights. Just my opinion! However, instead of society being really tough on violent criminals and clamping down hard on their appalling behaviour, the establishment treats them all with kid gloves and makes pathetic excuses - afraid of complaints, media outrage and a lawyers writ. Instead of the media praising a ‘copper’ who gives a mugger or rapist a good beating, cries of human rights abuse are hurled from every corner. I find it utterly appalling when I watch these so-called real-life police shows on British television, where the drug-dealer has just been arrested and is then offered a nice cup of tea before being locked away. A cup of tea! He should be punched in the fucking mouth. And to my horror, while writing this book, I lernt that there were 31,000 complaints against the police in 2001. The Independent Police Complaints Commission even has a website accurately explaining the process of making a complaint against them. I am sure that the majority of those complaints were not from innocent, law-abiding individuals going about their normal daily lives but from those that had broken the law and were complaining about the behaviour of the police while being investigated, arrested or charged. In my opinion if you do something wrong and get nicked, shut the fuck up and suffer the consequences. Let’s face it, I think we all generally recognise that the police in the UK have pretty pathetic powers against this increasingly violent world and by their own admission they are unable to control violent crime. The police are held in very low esteem in society and long gone are the days of being cautious and a little frightened of a patrolling police officer. We live in a violent world where alcohol and drugs provide people with Dutch courage and takes them to places and into situations they would never normally go. I have personally witnessed police standing by timidly and doing nothing while being spat at, verbally abused, mocked and laughed at, and once even vomited over. I personally know a number of good, decent, hard-working police officers; people with vision and ideals and principles, yet each and every one of them - without a single exception - is disillusioned and disheartened with the Force, policing policy and the rising levels of violence and crime in society.

‘Old school versus new school?’

When I was a very immature and immensely stupid eighteen year old (haven't changed much) I remember going out one evening to the Samson and Hercules nightclub in Tombland in Norwich. The Samson eventually turned into the Ritzy which was where I first started my long

career as a doorman. At that time The Samson was one of the only nightclubs in the city and a real pick-up joint. It was 1980, three years earlier John Travolta's Saturday Night Fever had started to make dancing relatively acceptable for men however, at the Samson, in the middle of sleepy rural Norfolk and a good few years behind the rest of the country (perhaps some would say the world), the dance-floor was full of small groups of giggling women dancing together round their white handbags, while the men paraded (like the sheep they probably shagged), round and round the dance floor hoping to pull.

I was very young, incredibly immature and extremely dense. That night, for some bizarre reason, I must have had a shandy or two too many and thought myself a real tough guy. Stupidly I tried to pick a fight with another guy because I thought he was eyeing up my girlfriend dancing with a few friends. She had a brain the size of a small walnut, but was buxom, blond and pretty and hey, I liked those traits in a woman. I noticed him standing by the side of the dance-floor smiling at her, or so I thought and so I went over and called him a cunt. He looked me up and down, laughed, called me wanker, and told me to fuck off. I shoved him in the chest, he shoved me back but before it went any further the bouncers came storming over. I remember gulping heavily and murmuring, 'Ooops,' as my ten stone skinny frame was hurled out the back exit and given a bloody good beating. I was left bleeding and vomiting in the gutter amongst the mouldy garbage and stinking piss. However I was taught a bloody good lesson and knew that, if I was ever stupid enough to behave like that again, I would probably get another good hiding, which I really didn't want. I had a black eye, cut lip, cracked ribs and ached for almost two weeks but I never caused trouble at The Sampson again. I was no gangster and I was definitely no threat to anyone, but I got a real good hiding for causing trouble which taught me a lesson. And to this very day I passionately believe that doormen should still be able to do the same; to teach trouble-makers a good hard lesson by giving them a bloody good beating. The only reason society is degenerating and violent crime widespread is because the police, security guards and doormen have very little power. Back in the 80s and early 90s doormen metered out punishments as and when required and ironically society was therefore much safer and a lot less violent than it is today - not just for clubbers but for everyone.

'Hold on,' I hear some of you puritan human-right campaigners cry. 'If you give door-staff carte-blanch to punish and discipline trouble-

makers with a fist or a boot, what's to say that firstly they won't go too far and secondly that they won't pick on and bully the innocent?'

As a fundamental humanitarian I understand the argument and can certainly recognise the worries and concerns that occasionally using old school methods of punishment and control might have. There will always be thugs and bullies working the doors and therefore there will always be the need to have some form of responsibility and accountability. However there were thugs and bullies working the doors twenty years ago and there are thugs and bullies working the doors now, even with all the new licences and registration door-staff now need to do the job. Back in the late 80s and early 90s the deterrent was losing our jobs or getting arrested, and so doormen didn't spend night after night, week after week battering the blameless and attacking the innocent. In the pubs and clubs I worked, when aggression was needed and used when it was justified, we performed. And because we went in hard, we developed a reputation. And because we had a reputation we therefore had less and less trouble; it was quickly understood that our venue was not the place to cause trouble. Therefore isn't that a perfect outcome? It is a win-win for everyone.

'Old school versus new school?'

When I first started working the doors as a novice, to prove myself to my peers and colleagues I did go too far from time to time and maybe I might have occasionally evicted the innocent, but it wasn't often and I quickly matured. I realised there was no need to prove who I was or what I was capable of; I knew my abilities and capabilities, I understood what I could and couldn't do and how far I could or couldn't go. And certainly back then there was infinitely more respect and a lot less alcohol related crime than there is today.

New school hasn't made things better or more civilised; it hasn't reduced crime or controlled drunkenness and violence. Time and time again statistics and public opinion show that violence in society is getting a lot worse and more and more people are becoming affected by it. We have tried to implement ethics and standards to the door industry and regulate the business but, when it comes to its influence on violent crime, drunken behaviour and social disorder, it simply is not working. It has not made any difference whatsoever. There is more violence on the streets than there ever has been.

So, should we therefore forsake the few to benefit the many? Should we recognise that there might occasionally be a wrongdoing - an infrequent uncalled-for beating, an innocent unfairly targeted - in order

to effectively reduce the overall colossal amount of drunkenness and violent crime? Should door-staff be allowed to teach scumbags a hard lesson and give them back some of what scumbags so easily give others? Should the scumbags and arseholes that flourish in the clubs, pubs and streets of the UK be made to suffer the consequences of their violent behaviour? Personally I believe they should. I would think that if you asked the general public whether the police should be more aggressive towards violent criminals, almost everyone, without exception would definitely shout a loud ‘yes’. Yet if you asked the general public if doormen should be allowed to be more aggressive I would think almost all would scream ‘no’. I wonder why?

‘Old school versus new school?’

Admittedly it is very easy to lose patience with advocates of the 'new school' philosophy as they patiently try to coerce drunken arseholes out of a club, or try to diplomatically work out the reasons behind a rowdy argument or pending bar brawl. My attitude is - and will always be - that if you are misbehaving in a club I am in charge of, you are going to get thrown out in a most undignified and humiliating manner, regardless of the reason or circumstance. I am not going to sit politely and discuss pros and cons, what happened or what didn’t happen, who started it and why. If you are in my club and you cause trouble then you are no longer welcome in my club. Simple. Causing a disturbance to others around you, really pisses me off and it will not be tolerated. Like I said, do what you want as long as you don’t upset or harm anyone else, but once you do expect the worst and accept the consequences. But this blatantly contradicts my fundamental philosophy of only using violence as the last resort and trying to look for alternatives!

So, am I ‘old school’ or ‘new school’? In a totally unreasonable and honestly irrational way I am both. If you are a scumbag arsehole and piss around, I am old school. If you cause grief and aggravation to innocent others in my club or on the street, I am old school. If you affect other innocent people’s lives with your violent attitude or behaviour I am really, really old school.

But, I understand that we all have problems and genuine disagreements and occasionally find ourselves in quite difficult and uncompromising situations, but as long as you can work things out without affecting or disturbing others around you, I am as new school as can be.

England To Moscow

I moved out to Moscow on the 10th January, 2003, a day after I finally split from my partner and mother to my daughter. I sneaked out of the house very early in the morning before anyone had woken up, leaving a brief apologetic note on the dining table alongside an envelope full of money. With just a bag full of clothes and about £12,000 - a third of the profits from the sale of the family house - in a brown paper bag tucked at the bottom of my camera case, I made my sad and lonely way from Manchester to Heathrow airport.

Leaving my beautiful four year old daughter was by far the worst thing I have ever done - or I expect will ever do. Before I finally shut the door on their lives forever I quietly crept upstairs and stood over her bed. With tears rolling down my eyes I watched her peaceful little face sleeping soundly. I felt completely and utterly desperate. I knew that when she woke up and called for her daddy, I would not be there. I would never be there. And she would never remember me being there. I loved my daughter dearly and deeply and adored every single minute of every single day with her. She was my whole life, my pride and joy. When things got too bad and I felt depressed and lonely, her smiley happy little face made things better. She was my saviour, my angel in a horrible world. I knew exactly how I wanted to bring her up; how to educate and influence her, but not long after she was born I understood that my plans and the desires, goals and the aspirations I had for her would never be realised, and it completely destroyed me.

From a purely financial perspective walking out on my family was by far the best thing to do as, quite simply, I could no longer cope. Once the house was sold and I was out of their lives forever I felt that things would eventually get better, for us all. As a single mother with two children I knew that my daughter's mother would be able to claim Social Security benefits and have her rent and rates paid and with the money from the house and any extra that I would try to give them once I got myself back on my feet, they would have enough money to live a basic but comfortable life. And I could escape as far away as possible from my creditors - I knew that no-one would track me to Moscow. For a while at least, I would be fairly safe from the burden of debt and could attempt to rebuild my life.

For years I had struggled to support the family - my daughter's mother, her child from another marriage and my daughter. Emotionally, physically and financially, I had got myself deeper and deeper into debt. I had stacks of unpaid bills - unpaid credit cards, unpaid utilities bills, unpaid instalments on a loan and an unpaid agreement on a car I had

leased a year previously which was subsequently repossessed. There were many times I had to rummage around the house for odd coppers to buy a pint of milk and nearly always turned the television up louder when the Mr. Softy ice-cream van came round - I didn't even have a spare pound to buy the children ice-creams.

When our relationship entered its final stages and we both understood that things were coming to an end, I managed to persuade my daughter's mother to sell the house. On the day of the sale and before the money was in my bank account, I didn't even have five pounds to put into the electricity meter for the incoming new owners - a few minutes after they had moved in the house was plunged into darkness. That was how desperate things were.

With just four nights work on the doors, and the occasional bodyguarding contract, we had been utterly destitute for about three years, ever since I left managing Equivino nightclub. Looking back I should have never have handed in my notice - I should have bitten my tongue, kept quiet, did what I was told and silently put up with the arrogance and lack of respect from my boss. Equivino nightclub was part of the Wilmslow Moat House Hotel and my boss was the hotel's General Manager. I handed in my notice after a huge row over a New Year's Eve promoter I had booked. We had a long standing relationship with another promoter called Andy Bassett who ran a regular Friday night promotion called 'Peruvia'. Unquestionably he brought a lot of money into the club, but Andy was a real pain in the arse and almost everyone hated him. Because that particular New Year's Eve fell on a Wednesday night, with the backing and the complete agreement of the hotel's manager, I had hired another promoter. Andy found out and stormed screaming to my boss who, in front of a lobby full of customers and staff, came screaming to me. I reminded him of our agreement and the fact that he knew all about New Year's Eve but he unashamedly denied any knowledge. Shortly after I handed in my notice - his deceit and lies forced me out of a job. My pride was my downfall and this chain of events ultimately led to the division of my family, my nervous breakdown and the separation of me and my daughter.

As well as being worn down with debt, I also had huge problems coping with my partners teenage daughter from a previous marriage. She had learning difficulties and an attitude and behaviour I detested (mainly prompted by her father who hated me). It was an extremely difficult situation and even if I wanted to try to change things, the scale of the task and the patience, hard work and dedication needed was, at that time,

far too much for me. It destroyed me - my soul and eventually my mind. I was completely broken. In my deep depression and loneliness all I wanted to do was to sleep, as only in sleep could I escape the turmoil and trouble of life and could ignore the chaotic world around me.

Although it was utterly and completely heartbreaking, after a breakdown and a week resting in a psychiatric hospital, I was finally able to make the decision that if I could not live happily and raise my daughter exactly as I wanted, I would just have to step aside, move on and let her mother do it.

I arrived at Heathrow airport early evening but my flight to Moscow wasn't until 8.30 the next morning, so I spent a very long and incredibly lonely night staring numbly at the blank walls, occasionally glancing over to the Pakistani cleaner carefully manoeuvring his floor-cleaning machine around seats and other obstacles, and at the tired looking policeman patrolling the floors of the terminal. Consumed with my thoughts and feelings, over and over I questioned my actions and behaviour and many times considered the possibility of enduring an unhappy, miserable life just so I could be with my daughter. Could I battle every day against the things I fundamentally and wholeheartedly disagreed with? Could I work in a boring, monotonous job - which would drive me insane - struggling every day and trying to pay off my huge debts? And if I could, would I eventually be able to give my family a better life? Could I abandon everything I believed in - my goals, objectives and ambitions - just so I could try to influence my daughter's life in some small way? If it was just my daughter then yes and I could probably live relatively contentedly and most certainly be completely in charge of my daughter's upbringing, education and destiny. If it was just us then undoubtedly I could influence her more or less exactly as I wanted and believed. But it wouldn't ever be just us; there was someone else in the family that I simply could not ignore and I knew I could never compromise; the battle would be too great and the problems far too difficult.

Throughout that long, lonely night I repeatedly got up from my seat and fiddled meaninglessly with my bags, with a vague intention of leaving the terminal building and getting on the first train back up to Manchester. But I didn't go back up to Manchester; I made it through the long night and remained at the airport. Even though I had no job, no home and no idea what the future would bring, I knew that I was on my way to a new life, a life I hoped would be considerably better and infinitely happier.

I had met Inna about a year previously. She worked as the personal assistant to the ex-KGB director of a security company who I occasionally subcontracted to whenever I was working on contract in Moscow. The company, BLM Security, provided a comprehensive investigation and security consultancy service and I used them a couple of times when my clients needed corporate investigations or private security services and had supplied me with an excellent team of Russian bodyguards for a short close protection contracts I had with a foreign client. Inna knew a lot about security, we got on extremely well and we instantly had a common bond. Whenever I was in Moscow, Inna and I would spend time together visiting the most popular museums and art galleries and she happily showed me many of Moscow's historical monuments. We would almost always end our time together sitting chatting on our favourite bench in the famous Gorky Park. When I returned home we continued to exchange e-mails on an almost daily basis until my next hoped-for trip.

In November 2002, when Inna visited the UK on business with her boss, our friendship became a bit more than just friends. She had arranged to stay in England an extra two days after her business ended and her boss returned to Russia. We spent those two days together at the four-star beautifully elegant Oakley Court Hotel on the outskirts of Windsor, which a good friend managed and let me have a room for a fraction of the normal cost. Inna and I walked and talked and, for the first time in a very long while, I felt totally at ease. I loved being in her company; she made me feel calm and content and happy, but above everything she made me laugh and I hadn't laughed properly for years.

Inna knew that my home life was unstable and that essentially I was extremely miserable. She knew I desperately wanted and needed to change the world in which I lived, but she also understood I had a daughter whom I adored and leaving her would not be easy. We talked and talked and it was during that weekend I started to form definite and specific plans to leave my family in Manchester - not because I was cheating but because I finally realised that it was possible to be happy again. Inna made me happy and she made me realise that life could be great, that things would eventually work out and that I didn't need to be miserable and unhappy. Somehow, magically, I knew I had found my soul-mate - that one special person with whom I felt I could be with, forever. She helped me understand that living a miserable life was fundamentally wrong. Inna made me understand that my daughter was always going to be my daughter, and whether I lived with her or not I

would always love her, and she would always love me and I would see her as often as I could. I could call her and write and she would grow up bright and secure and stable, whether I brought her up or whether she was brought up by her mother.

After a wonderful and happy two days in Windsor I bade Inna a sad farewell at the departure gate at Heathrow's Terminal Two and made my lonely way back to Manchester. I didn't want to go home. I didn't want to go back to the arguments and difficulties, back to the tension, stress and debt.

Before Inna had even touched down in Moscow I had found an internet café at a service station on the M6 and had written her a long e-mail. I told her that I was definitely going to split and that I would sell my house and move out to Moscow. I told her that I wanted a new life, a happy life.

Had I told her too much?

The next day, from work, Inna replied. She said she agreed with me. She said I deserved to be happy, to find happiness and was really pleased that I was coming to Moscow. She said she couldn't wait for me to arrive and that she would start to look around for an inexpensive apartment for me to rent.

The day after, I replied asking whether, after we had got to know each other a bit better, she would consider living with me? It was a brash, bold thing to ask but I felt that without Inna's help and support, I would not survive for long in Moscow on my own. Working there a few weeks a year is very different to living there, and surviving in Russia is hard enough for Russians let alone foreigners, and on my own in Moscow, without work, friends or knowing the language would have been too much. I had been to Moscow many times and knew the city extremely well but it was always on contract and I would almost always stay with my clients in the same first class, western-style hotels. This time I was proposing to live permanently with the Russians, like the Russians and without Inna by my side to help me I wasn't sure whether I could.

She replied later that same day by saying that her boss's son had a small one-bedroom apartment that we could rent for 400 USD a month - although the currency in Russia is the rouble, the US dollar was almost always favoured - and that yes, she would be happy to move in with me...straight away! I was ecstatic. The following day, before I had even put the house on the market, I borrowed three months rent from a friend and sent it to Inna via Western Union. She was to secure the apartment from the first of January 2003. I had made a decision - I was going to

Moscow and I was going to live with Inna and there was nothing that anyone could do to stop me.

As I stepped onto Aeroflot flight number SU241 to Moscow I understood that the past was the past - what I was, what I had done and who I had become would no longer be a part of my new life. I was changing and the future looked good. As I settled into my seat and fastened my seat belt, a huge weight seemed to rise from my shoulders. I was starting again; I had no other possessions apart from the cash, a camera and a bag full of old clothes. I had debts of well over £20,000 but I knew my debtors would never find me in Russia and anyway, I had no intention of paying them back - not for a long while anyway. There was a small apartment waiting for me and I had a lovely funny girlfriend with whom I seemed to have so much in common. I had been through so many ups and downs; incredible highs and terrible lows and, as I fastened my seat belt and listened to the roar of the engines, silently prayed to whatever God there may be sitting on those fluffy white clouds in the sky; please let this be the road to a better, newer, happier life.

Going from an English middle class semi in a quiet suburban cul-de-sac to a crowded high-rise apartment block in the suburbs of Moscow was an enormous culture shock. In almost every direction the rows and rows of dirty white apartment blocks towered above like monstrous ugly centurions guarding the landscape. People huddled against the snow, darting in and out of tiny dark ominous looking openings. As we approached our building, building number twelve in a row of about twenty, I nervously looked around at my surroundings; everything around me seemed so dilapidated and run down, but the area was apparently one of the best. Apparently it was a prestigious place to live and populated by lecturers and teachers from the nearby Moscow State University, but in England high-rise apartments like those would have been long since demolished. I found it hard to hide my shock, and wasn't at all sure if I would ever be able to adapt to this new and extremely strange environment.

Inna had spent a couple of days cleaning and getting the apartment ready for my arrival. It was typically Russian apartment and totally un-modernised; electrical sockets were hanging half-out from the walls, wires went haphazardly here and there across the floors and ceiling, the old decrepit cooker was falling to pieces and the oven door didn't close properly, the fridge didn't work at all, there was no front panelling on almost all of the kitchen drawers, most of the lower cupboard units had

broken doors and there was no bed - only an extremely uncomfortable-looking tiny sofa bed.

I bit my lip and held my tongue and, although I desperately wanted to find the nearest comfortable western-style hotel, decided that at least things couldn't get any worse. After a desperately needed cup of tea and a nice hot shower, I lightly leant on the bathroom sink to clean my teeth, which instantly came away from the wall and fell crashing to the floor. Inna rushed over and found me standing naked with a mouthful of toothpaste amongst big chunks of sink.

That evening, Inna had made a huge saucepan of traditional Russian Borsch soup, made from beetroot and served with soured cream and delicious little meat-filled pastries, and we spent that first evening together getting drunk on expensive Georgian wine, sipping steaming hot soup and staring at the growing blizzard outside. Perhaps things wouldn't be too bad after all.

I suppose I really fell in love with Inna at the local supermarket on my second day in Moscow, and the second day of us living together. After a surprisingly comfortable night on the extremely uncomfortable looking sofa-bed - partly due to the huge amount of wine we had consumed - we decided to go shopping. Inna had to go back to work the following day and I didn't fancy venturing out on my own in the appalling weather so we needed enough food in the house to last at least until the following weekend when Inna and I could go shopping together once again.

The winters in Moscow are cold, harsh and hard and last for months upon months. It was minus twenty degrees outside and the blizzard was howling and swirling menacingly around the buildings. We wrapped up as warmly as we could, donning layer upon layer of our warmest clothing. With thick woollen scarves covering our faces, hats pulled down tightly over our ears and gloves almost up to our elbows, we made our intrepid way to the local supermarket, a ten minute battle away.

In a country where even the simplest words are totally incomprehensible and where nothing at all even slightly resembles English, shopping in Russia can be an extremely frustrating and testing experience. Occasionally pictures on labels indicate the contents but not all labels have pictures and some pictures can be very misleading. As I strolled up and down the narrow crowded isles looking confusingly at all the products, I knew it would be a long time before I could ever be let loose in the supermarket on my own and I would most certainly need Inna's help for many months to come.

Although at that time Inna had quite a strong Russian accent, her English was nevertheless very good. She studied at the Moscow State University and obtained a linguistics degree in English and French. Apart from her almost daily e-mails to me when I was in the UK, and the occasional long telephone call, at work she also had to regularly translate complex documents from Russian into English for her foreign clients and, on occasion, speak directly with them on the telephone assessing and analysing in detail their specific needs and requirements. Although she would sometimes say something I didn't quite understand or confuse a verb ending or muddle a sentence, by and large Inna's English was excellent and I understood most of what she said, most of the time. Or so I thought until we went shopping.

We wandered up and down the aisles slowly filling the trolley with a variety of strange looking yet, hopefully, tasty food. As Inna placed a couple of jars of my favourite pickled herrings into the bottom of the trolley she looked up at me and, with a naive and innocent smile said: 'I love a good fisting, don't you?'

My jaw dropped, my eyes bulged, I turned a bright red colour and a lump rose in my throat (and possibly elsewhere). I didn't know what to say. After what seemed like an eternity I finally I spluttered, 'Pardon?'

'Fist, I love a good fisting.'

Had I heard her correctly? I was totally dumbstruck and I wasn't sure whether to make a mad dash for the nearest exit and onto the next bus to the airport, or to grin stupidly at the weird notion of what was to come. She looked at me, smiled and nodded, expecting me to confirm that I too loved a good fisting. I stared embarrassed into the trolley desperately seeking inspiration in a packet or jar of something strange when she said, 'Big cock or small?'

This definitely wasn't the best time to talk about her fisting experiences, nor was it the time to answer her second and infinitely more personal question. I could tell this was going to be complex. Wondering what on earth to say I anxiously looked up to see her standing next to the Coke stand; in one hand she held a large bottle and the other a small.

'Big cock or small?' she repeated innocently.

I let out a deep sigh of relief. 'Large,' I muttered quickly, lying. And then I looked back down into the trolley feeling a little embarrassed and extremely confused. Suddenly it dawned on me what she meant. A wave of relief swept over me as I answered her first question.

'No darling, there is nothing like a good feast.' I replied.

She looked at me for a few seconds, confused and then smiled as she put the large ‘cock’ into the trolley. I could see that she was wondering whether she had said everything correctly but I hadn’t the heart to explain the subtle and somewhat delicate difference between having a good feast and a good fisting. I never found out which one she prefers but I couldn’t help but fall in love with her after that - how could anyone not love a woman that muddles the words fist and feast?

In early April 2003 we decided to get married.

We had known each other for well over a year and had been living together for almost four months. She was my best-friend, my lover and she really was my soul-mate. I didn’t ask Inna, she didn’t ask me, we just sort of fell into the conversation one evening after fisting - no, feasting - on soup and red wine. We both drunkenly thought it was rather a fun thing to do and I was sure that getting married in Russia would be an interesting experience and something I was bound not to do that often. I wasn’t wrong.

Obviously excited about the idea, Inna immediately telephoned her family and friends but I decided not to tell anyone. I wanted to keep it as quiet as possible - I had just ended a long term relationship and I had selfishly walked out on my daughter and I didn’t want anyone knowing that I had decided to get married just a few short months later. I didn’t feel ashamed or guilty, just awkward and undertook to keep it a secret from my friends and family for as long as I could.

We decided to have a quick, simple wedding. However getting the correct paperwork together in the monstrously bureaucratic Russian Federation was far from straightforward. Firstly we had to get the British Embassy to translate my divorce forms into Russian but because one single letter (not word, letter!) was incorrect it was returned to us by the Moscow marriage bureau and had to be completely translated a second time.

Once we eventually had the correct translation, with all the right words and letters in the right place, we then had to personally submit the documents to one special department of the marriage bureau that dealt specifically with foreigners. Strangely, the department that specifically dealt with foreigners also dealt with every other marriage application and the queue was horrific. Crowds surged around a single door, all trying to jostle themselves in, once a couple had managed to squeeze themselves out. I got angrier and angrier at the impolite morons around me but Inna kept me cool and we eventually managed to ease ourselves through that tiny hole in the wall and submit all the correct documentation and

translations, each document doubtlessly stamped fifteen times in quadruplet. We paid all the required fees and, in all probability, various fees that weren't required as well.

Our wedding was eventually planned for the 18th of April 2003.

Although all of Inna's family would be attending the wedding reception, we decided not to invite anyone to the actual ceremony. Inna's grandparents were too old and frail to come into Moscow, and her parents couldn't get the whole day off work - apparently, according to both their tyrannical employers, a daughter getting married wasn't a good enough excuse to have time off! We didn't even have a witness - in Russia you didn't need one. Inna and I were going to be the only two people at our wedding and that suited the both of us just fine.

Our wedding was booked for 3.30 in the afternoon. We reserved a Mercedes to pick us up from the apartment forty-five minutes beforehand and take us to the wedding hall, the other side of Moscow. I was dressed in my best Marks and Spencer, blue pin-stripped suit, and the only decent tie I could find, as Inna had decided to pop them all into the washing machine a few days earlier, with disastrous results. Out of the twenty or so dishevelled and deformed ties I eventually managed to find one that, after hours of pressing and stretching, was wearable and more or less matched my suit. Inna looked stunning in a gorgeous light and dark blue evening dress with a blue silk shawl.

In typical Russian style, the car honked loudly as it sat waiting impatiently for us downstairs. As we left the entrance to our apartment block and walked across the courtyard we must have looked slightly odd dressed in our finest amongst the tattiness of our surroundings. Everyone stopped and stared, probably not knowing whether to smile affectionately or laugh hysterically.

The driver, dressed in his best t-shirt and ripped, tatty jeans stood smoking against his old and obviously badly maintained vehicle. As we approached he took one last long drag, exhaled and flicked his half-finished cigarette to the floor. He then jumped back in the car leaving me to open the passenger door for Inna. At least the car was relatively tidy inside, I thought to myself, as Inna and I sat silently together, but I was absolutely sure that, with every mile we drove, the crack running through the middle of the windscreen was getting longer. I spent most of the journey nervously praying that it wouldn't break and therefore suddenly find ourselves stuck by the side of the road.

As we approached Marriage Building Number Six I breathed a huge sigh of relief - we had made it. My rattled nerves settled and it seemed I

had nothing more to worry about until I noticed lots of other wedding cars coming and going. What was going on? Had I made a terrible mistake and somehow muddled up the time of our wedding? We pulled up behind a queue of other cars transporting couples who, it seemed, were all getting married at the same time! I looked at Inna puzzled, but she just smiled back, looking radiant and happy and not giving me any clue that something might be seriously going wrong.

'What are all these people doing here?' I whispered cautiously, not wanting to give her any indication that I was completely baffled.

'Getting married, I expect,' she replied grinning.

I frowned and followed her through the entrance into the Grand Hall where we were met by an elderly fat woman with a clip-board. She looked directly at me and spoke for a few seconds in Russian. I glanced at Inna who quickly replied. The fat woman pointed to a small padded seat at the far end of the Hall, where apparently we were to wait until called.

In England couples normally marry in either a church or a registry office or with an official registrar at a special venue. In general only the couple and their invited guests attend, but in Russia in a Mormon-like wedding, ten to fifteen couples all marry at the same time at one of the various official marriage buildings scattered around the region. Everyone was waiting in what I presumed was some sort of a queue - with Inna and me, it seemed, at the very beginning. I looked around at the vast, ornately decorated hall and at the different groups of couples and their guests clustered together around their allocated padded benches dotted about the room. As Inna and I sat silently waiting to be called, we watched as the other couples chatted nervously amongst themselves, with their guests and families fussing over them; flattening imaginary creases, brushing away non-existent dust and occasionally stealing glances over at the two of us sitting quietly alone. They must have thought what a sad and lonely couple we were - not having anyone to invite to our wedding.

The room slowly filled with the young and old and the place buzzed with excitement. Except for one couple that looked middle-aged, most couples were in their early twenties. All the women, with the exception of Inna, wore elegant, flowing, gleaming white wedding dresses. All the men, with the exception of me, wore cheap looking, obviously Russian-made polyester suits. I am not sure what it is, but there is something unique and distinctive about how the majority of Russian men dress. Even at a wedding, Russian men still look typically Russian. While the women looked glamorous and attractive and you could tell that they had

spent hour upon hour getting ready, Russian men seemed as though they really couldn't give a damn. I wouldn't be surprised that, if they had a choice, most would prefer to turn up to their wedding wearing the ubiquitous shell-suit and trainers.

Finally a morose, miserable looking clerk emerged from a side door and loudly called our names. The room suddenly fell silent at my obviously non-Russian sounding surname, and everyone looked our way. Ignoring their stares, Inna and I excitedly got up and almost ran towards the grand double-doors of the Marriage Hall at the end of the room. However we were stopped half-way and ushered into a dour, tatty-looking side office and into a couple of cheap plastic seats. A middle-aged grumpy looking woman with the most amazing bouffant hair style I have ever seen, was sitting behind a large cluttered wooden desk. She asked Inna a couple of questions in Russian. Inna turned to me and translated: 'Would we like our marriage certificate plasticated?'

'Plasticated?' I asked, not knowing what she meant.

'You know, with plastic cover over it' she explained.

'Oh, laminated.' I understood. 'Why not?' I said a little confused as I was expecting to get married.

Inna turned back to the woman and confirmed in Russia that yes, we would like the certificate plasticated. The woman said something else in return.

'A hundred roubles,' Inna said, smiling.

I fumbled for my wallet, took out a hundred rouble note and handed it over.

The Bouffant took the money and quickly popped it into the top drawer and, without another word, we were quickly ushered back into the Grand Hall.

A few minutes later, the same miserable clerk once again emerged from the same side door and once again called out our names. This time the hushed chatter continued, no-one looked our way and we were completely ignored. For a few brief seconds I thought we were going to be ushered into the same office and asked to pay a few more roubles for another plasticated piece of paper, but this time we were directed towards the grand double doors which miraculously opened as we approached. Just as we entered I heard another name called out loudly behind me and I smiled to myself as another couple, thinking they were off to be married, were summoned to be 'plasticated'.

The flamboyantly decorated Marriage Hall was about half the size of the Grand Hall but still far too big for its purpose. We were directed to

a stand in the middle of the room and, at the far end, a young female Registrar stood smiling. It was the first smile we had seen that day.

The brief marriage service commenced and, because the woman spoke entirely in Russian, I didn't understand a word. As part of the initial fee we had to pay to the department that specifically dealt with foreign marriages, we were supposed to have an English - Russian translator, but there was no-one in sight. The woman spoke in Russian to Inna for three or four minutes and Inna said 'Da' (yes) at various intervals. The woman then turned to me, looked me straight in the eyes and spoke for about ten seconds, after which there was an embarrassing silence. Inna elbowed me in the side and whispered loudly in my ear, 'Say, da.'

'Da,' I said.

The miserable clerk who had initially ushered us into the room suddenly appeared from a small side door, smiled and approached with our rings - which Inna had given to her earlier - housed in a small ornate wooden box. I was surprised as they sat looking up at us from their snug little home. I honestly believed that they had been sold to a dodgy looking Russian (obviously wearing a shell-suit and trainers) sitting in a clapped out dirty Lada out the back, and would never been seen again.

I placed the ring on Inna's third finger right hand (the opposite hand to England) and Inna did the same to me.

We were married.

On turning to leave I managed to say, 'Spasiba (thank you)' to the registrar who immediately replied in perfect accent-less English, 'You are welcome.'

We had booked the same Mercedes taxi to take us to a restaurant in the centre of the industrial town of Zelenograd, about forty kilometres north west of Moscow, where her parents and grandparents lived. Surprisingly the car hadn't broken down or lost its windscreen and was waiting for us outside the wedding hall. As we approached we noticed the driver fast asleep at the wheel, his mouth wide-open snoring loudly. Inna banged hard on the window.

Zelenograd used to be the 'Silicon Valley' of the Soviet Union and was originally founded in 1958 by two American spies, Bert and Sarantos. They were spying for the Soviet Union in America and, when they were just about to be discovered, were secretly smuggled - by the KGB - out of the USA to Moscow. Once in Russia they had a secret meeting with Khruschov, who was then General Secretary of the Communist Party. Khruschov, a dedicated, hardened communist, loved

all things American. Bert and Sarantos suggested that the Soviet Union should have its own Silicon Valley, Khruschov enthusiastically agreed and Zelenograd was born. All the talented scientists, researchers and academics from throughout the Soviet Union were sent to Zelenograd to work and it became one of the most powerful centres of microchips, lasers and micro-electronic production throughout the whole of the Soviet Union.

Inna's grandfather, an officer in the Soviet Army, was sent to Zelenograd as head of Civil Defence, and his whole family followed soon after. Before communism collapsed, Inna's mother worked in the Institute of Scientific Research as a chemical engineer and her father was an engineer in a factory producing microchips. Up until 1991 Zelenograd was a closed city; it wasn't on any maps or charts, no foreigners were allowed into the region and none of its inhabitants were allowed to go abroad - each one also had to sign an Official Secrets Act. Once communism collapsed money dried up, there was no investment by the new Russian Government and one by one the institutes and factories closed. Unemployment amongst the most educated and skilled in Russia soared. Inna's parents had to quickly find other employment - her father became an instructor at a sports centre and her mother a manager for a lingerie company. However, after years of deprivation and ruin Zelenograd is slowly getting back on its feet, industry is moving back into the district and new shops, cafés and restaurants are opening almost every day.

We found a typically Russian restaurant in the central square called 'Russian Forest' and it seemed an ideal, cosy place to hold a small reception. We were allocated a small, private dining room separate from the main restaurant. As the restaurant's name implied, the room resembled a wooden cabin in the forest, with stuffed animals and animal heads on ledges and shelves on every wall, and rifles, axes and hunting equipment in every corner. The food was typically traditional Russian cuisine; some dishes were truly wonderful and extremely tasty while others I couldn't touch. Pike (a large freshwater fish found in many lakes and rivers in Eastern Europe) in a thick layer of Aspic jelly was the worse, the taste of the Aspic wouldn't leave my mouth, but thankfully there was lots and lots of wine to wash everything down with.

Altogether there were twelve of us; Inna's mother and father, her grandparents on her father's side, her grandmother on her mother's side (her grandfather had died a few months earlier), her brother and his wife, and her uncle, aunt and cousin. Although I understood almost nothing

and I was totally baffled for most of the evening, it was nevertheless a really nice family occasion with lots of puzzling and unbelievably long toasts which Inna translated into English. I just wanted to drink lots of strong Russian vodka and sit quietly in the corner in a contented alcoholic haze but every time I touched the glass intending to take a quiet sip on my own, one member of the family or other would notice, stand up, tap the glass with a fork or spoon and make a toast, which seemed to last weeks. The full glass would then be 'downed' in one gulp. After a few toasts the room was spinning, but at least I was achieving what I desired.

Throughout the evening the restaurant manager kept popping her head around the door - not to ask if everything was all right and whether we were enjoying the meal - but to try and get us out into the main restaurant to dance. I ignored the first couple of occasions as I didn't understand what she was saying, but the third time I asked Inna if there was a problem.

'They want us to go through to the other room and dance,' Inna said.

'Why?' I asked, confused but not surprised, after all this was Russia and that whole day hadn't been what I would call a particularly normal wedding day.

'Because they had booked a special DJ for us.'

'But we didn't order a special DJ.'

'I know! But they want us to dance anyway and then we would have to pay for him.'

'Tell them to fu...' luckily Inna's father held his hand high with another full glass of vodka for yet another toast.

I had agreed in advance to pay for the meal (Inna's parents had agreed to pay for the wine) and had already given the money to Inna's mother who had meticulously arranged the menu and price with the restaurant beforehand. At the end of the evening we got the bill which was completely different and quite a lot more than the price originally agreed. Inna's mother carefully went through item by item and found that the restaurant had added quite a number of things to the bill which were never ordered. I suppose, being a foreigner at a provincial restaurant, they had thought that we could be easily tricked into paying for things we didn't have and that we wouldn't think about checking the bill, item by item. But they were completely wrong; Inna's mother was on the ball. After arguing with the manageress and then with the owners and then having to try to prove that we never received the extra items detailed, the

bill was eventually and reluctantly altered. Even at a wedding reception some Russians will try anything for a few extra roubles.

We had earlier decided against keeping the Mercedes - it would have cost far too much for him to sit outside the restaurant for three or four hours waiting for us, and then drive us all the way back into Moscow. So, at the end of the evening, after Inna and I had said our farewells, we made our way to the bus-stop where we queued and caught the last bus back to Moscow. From the bus terminal in the north of Moscow we then took the metro all the way across the city to our stop in the south. As we sat there in our 'finest', looking extremely out of place in the tatty carriage amongst the evening's drunks, revellers and late commuters, we both sat quietly pondering about the future we would have together. I laughed silently to myself - it had been a bizarre day and, on the night of our wedding, we ended it by taking the bus and metro all the way home. The best thing was that Inna couldn't care less.

She really was one in a million.

Once we emerged from our metro stop we hailed a beat up old Lada taxi to our apartment and fell fully clothed on the sofa bed and into a deep sleep.

Spring turned into summer and we were enjoying life as a married couple. I loved Inna dearly. She had managed to turn my life from one in which I was mostly miserable and unhappy, to a life of joy and laughter and happiness. We had so much in common and we had so much fun together that I had trouble remembering the despair and desperation I had once found myself in. I still missed my daughter terribly of course, but I wrote to her every few days and telephoned her once a week and I was slowly coming to terms with life apart from her. Although it was difficult, it wasn't as bad as I had anticipated it to be.

Moscow's summers are brief but wonderful. Summer arrives at the end of June and for three months there is very little rain and temperatures soar to the high twenties. It was during that summer that Inna and I met a girl called Maria begging at the entrance to a metro station near to where Inna worked.

A few months earlier, I was minding my own business sitting on the metro on the way to meet Inna from work. As I sat in the carriage playing with my mobile phone and ignoring everyone around me, I was approached by a disabled man, begging for a few roubles. I looked up at him staring down at me and could see he had no arms - just short stumps protruding from his striped sleeveless vest. He appeared tragic and sad and, after I popped the equivalent of about twenty pence into a small

purse hanging from his neck, felt ashamed and disgusted with myself. I could have given so much more but, like most people, I had become insensitive and desensitised to the plight of beggars and generally ignored the sad, lonely world surrounding me. In Moscow beggars were everywhere, on every street corner, in every metro station, on every metro carriage. Unlike many beggars in the UK, in Russia they are not mentally ill, drug addicts or alcoholics, but generally 'normal' people who genuinely could not survive on what the government paid them - the elderly and the disabled, the destitute, the ill and the infirm. Mother's begged for the money to buy medication for their children, war-veterans displayed their amputations in order to eat, the elderly begged because they no longer had anyone that cared for them and couldn't survive on their meagre pension. It was awful to see so much poverty and deprivation in a country so incredibly rich. Russia, the second biggest oil producer in the world, has a huge financial surplus yet it continues to treat its poor, elderly and disabled in a degrading and shocking manner. It isn't because the country doesn't have any the facilities or the ability to provide for its citizens, it is simply because nobody gives a damn and couldn't care less. The money disappears into the pockets of officials long before it ever reaches the needy. According to an article I once read in the Moscow Times, Government auditors could not find almost ninety percent of the money allocated to the poor. It had simply disappeared.

After watching this poor, tragic man stroll sadly down the carriage asking other passengers for a few more roubles I vowed to myself that I would do more to help the next victim of Russia's heartbreakingly wretched society I would come across.

I got off the metro at Alekseevskaya street, and followed the flow of people onto the escalator and up into the world above. The escalator led up to a small open area with kiosks selling flowers, magazines, medicines and cigarettes. In between the two rows of kiosks were the thick heavy swinging doors that led outside. With every swish of the door an intense blast of cold penetrated the metro. People pulled down their hats, tightened their scarves and pulled up their collars as they left the warmth of the metro for the cold of Moscow's streets. As I walked passed the kiosks towards the swinging doors, something against the wall near the door caught my eye. I looked down to see a pretty dark haired girl on a small wooden platform, arms outstretched, bare hands cupped. She could have been no more than twenty, and I could immediately see she had no legs; her torso was strapped to a small wooden wheeled platform with a thick belt. Lying next to her on the wet dirty floor was a

wooden block with a handle. I was steered through the doors and out of the metro with the crowd, but I kept glancing back at this pretty girl staring up at everyone as they rushed blindly passed her, barely looking down. I quickly rushed to where I had arranged to meet Inna and dragged her back to the metro but by the time we arrived the pretty girl had somehow disappeared. I had briefly formed an idea of writing a heart-rending story for a British magazine about a disabled girl begging to survive in Russia. I would then sell the story and give the girl the money, but it wasn't until a few months later during the summer that Inna saw her begging again. Inna called me, describing her and asking if it was the same girl that I had seen previously. I thought it was and asked Inna to arrange a meeting with her.

Her name was Maria, and the following day Inna and I sat with her for almost three hours as she told us her story. Maria spoke no English and so while I fiddled with my camera and daydreamed, Inna listened and made notes. Later that evening, back at our apartment and over numerous cups of tea, Inna translated the story into English while I frantically scribbled. It took me about two weeks to write up the story and another two to three weeks to e-mail the editors of almost every British woman's magazine. Inna and I were hoping to give Maria and her son some money and, as time passed and non of the magazines replied, we felt guilty at not fulfilling our promise. It wasn't until much later when we eventually returned to England that we finally managed to do something to help them....

Russia's Bodyguards

Russia is still perceived as being a high-risk environment and, primarily because of Chechnya and Dagestan, rates a Category Four out of five for overall global risk. Air Security International lists a Category Four as: A high threat of physical harm due to violent acts associated with crime, demonstrations or terrorism. A Category Five - the highest - is the same as Category Four but ends with and war. However, apart from the occasional football riot and racist mugging, there is actually very little street violence in Moscow. It is still reasonably safe for a woman to catch a bus or taxi home at 4.00 in the morning; unlike in the UK! Russian girls are never, ever seen spewing in the gutter with their naked arses in the air and Russian doormen rarely clash with groups of drunken yobs outside their venue. In a city of over twelve million people, where there are certainly extreme forms of organised crime and huge corruption, most people leading normal everyday lives are relatively safe and, contrary to what most people believe, Moscow is a relatively safe

city for most foreigners, even for the heads of large businesses or the enormously wealthy. Long gone are the days of open street warfare and gangland assassinations. In the past, if you were a foreigner in charge of a high-profile major business, emerging from your office without the protection of armed bodyguards would have been extremely risky, and was something you simply would never do. But in today's Moscow you can drive your luxury vehicle almost anywhere (within the city's boundaries) and you can go almost everywhere and do almost anything legitimate without the threat of kidnap or assassination.

The Russian Mafia still continue to extort and control Russian businesses and openly target other Russian Mafia gangs, but foreigners are left well alone - only under exceptional circumstances would a foreigner ever be a target for assassination and then usually because he is involved in some kind of shady dealings or business partnership. Otherwise it simply isn't worth it; Russian economy largely depends upon foreign investment and if foreigners were regularly and openly targeted by organised crime groups they, and their money, would quickly leave the country, leaving Russia once again in financial turmoil. One of the very last high-profile cases of a foreigner being publicly assassinated was on November 3rd , 1996 when the American part-owner of one of Moscow's top hotels was killed in broad daylight not far from his office.

Paul Tatum was shot in cold blood with an automatic Kalashnikov in front of several passers-by. It happened at around 5pm as Tatum, accompanied by two of his bodyguards, left the Slavyanskaya hotel and headed towards Kievskaya metro station where he had arranged to meet somebody. Kievskaya metro is integrated within the mainline railway station and is situated literally right next to the hotel, and thus only a short walk away. In the underground passageway Tatum's killer walked up to him and shot him eleven times at point-blank range. The killer then calmly laid his gun down on the passageway steps and walked away, while his bodyguards stood silently by. Eleven bullets ended Tatum's long dispute with the Moscow City Government as well as with his so-called business partner. Apparently, the dispute involved Tatum's refusal to pay a bribe of one million dollars to cover up an original earlier bribe he had made of half a million dollars. He was being extorted in typical Russian Mafia style; pay a second bigger bribe to cover up the first bribe. This extortion method is still widely used today, especially by the traffic police. They will stop you for speeding, being in the wrong lane, skipping traffic lights, driving erratically, looking drunk, or just driving and, if you incorrectly offer them money, they will arrest you again for

attempting to bribe a police officer - thus soliciting even more from you. Instead of offering a bribe to any policeman in Moscow, you must always ask if there is an on the spot fine to pay and be very cautious and careful with your words when handing over the cash.

Within two days the Russian press forgot all about Tatum's murder. There was no enquiry and he was hastily buried in the Kuntsevsky Cemetery in Moscow before his relatives were able to arrange with his Embassy for his body to be taken back to the US. Everything was covered up and quickly forgotten. Word on the streets portrayed Tatum as a being a fairly dubious character who apparently had lots of differences and arguments with his Chechen business partner who half owned the hotel. An American/Chechen business partnership was probably doomed to failure from the very start - with the odds considerably stacked against the American.

Russian businessmen, public figures and celebrities are still at risk, but Tatum was probably the last high profile assassination of a foreign businessman in Moscow since the crisis of 1998 when ninety percent of all foreigners left Russia, abandoning their businesses and homes as overnight hundreds of banks collapsed, thousands of businesses went bust and the rouble devalued.

In the modern Moscow of today, foreigners are rarely targeted and contracts for the protection of foreigners has dwindled to just an occasional job with a paranoid (mainly American) executive who still perceives Moscow streets as crime ridden and violent. However it was a completely different story back in 1993 when I carried out my first ever close protection contract working alongside a bodyguarding team of mainly ex Spetsnaz - Russian Special Forces. Ironically it was at that very same hotel that Tatum once owned.

It was November 1993 and I had just returned from almost two years in the Balkans. The first year, 1992, I was delivering humanitarian aid for an English charity called Feed The Children. My friend Alan, who lived in Norwich, picked me up from Paris with a shipment of aid he had collected locally. Like many people at that time, he had seen the news and wanted to do something to help. He raised money and collected food and clothing and medicines and put it all in the back of his Toyota Hi-Lux in order to take it to Croatia. He telephoned me in Paris asking me if I wanted to come along. I immediately agreed and arranged to take a few days away from my job managing Le Central, a top Parisian nightclub on the Champs Élysée. The following day he picked me up from outside my apartment in Montmarte and we drove to Croatia. Initially the plan was

to deliver the aid and return to our normal, everyday lives, but one thing led to another; a charity based in Reading called Feed The Children had somehow heard of our jaunt and offered us a permanent job. Our remit was to identify areas of greatest need and arrange the safe delivery of the appropriate aid. A massive UK television appeal ensued and we ended up delivering ton upon ton of aid all over former Yugoslavia. The second year I was again based in Croatia fulfilling a variety of security and protection related contracts which included extracting the family of a Croatian businessman from the front-line, looking after various reporters and journalists and escorting Charles Spencer, the brother of the late Princess Diana.

In 1993 Russia was in turmoil. The streets were a lot like Chicago in the twenties, gunshots were often heard and assassinations were common amongst the Mafia gangs clamouring for control of the city. The economy was a free-for-all and anyone who had the guts, drive and determination, and a will to survive, could literally make millions overnight. Everything was available and the potential for wealth enormous.

Although starting a business in Moscow was not easy for foreigners, thousands were attracted to this completely untouched and immensely lucrative market. From Asia, the US and Europe, foreigners flocked to Russia intending to start new businesses and enterprises and to capitalise on this fresh, bright and extremely exciting market. Profits could be huge and investing in Russia was a risk many were willing to take.

Bribes were paid, palms were greased, everyone was on the ‘game’ and with enough money anything and everything could be arranged. It was (and still is) possible to kill someone in broad daylight, get caught red-handed with the gun still smoking in your hand and get away with it - judges are easily bribed and the police almost always paid off.

Back in the early '90s, Russia became an open, free market and almost anything could be imported. Shelves rapidly filled with everything from the exotic to the erotic, and Russians quickly realised they could have all the wonderful things that they could only previously dream about: nice cars, modern apartments, household appliances, designer clothes, cameras, watches, jewellery. Russians could work hard, save hard and hope to eventually buy whatever they wanted.

Or they could steal.

And many stole.

Organised crime, bribery and corruption spiralled out of control. Officials in almost every government department - from the very top to

the very bottom - stole or took bribes; from planning permission for a high-rise apartment block to a stamp for a prescription, if you wanted something from someone you had no other choice but to pay. If you paid the right price in just a couple of months you could get planning permission to build a huge skyscraper in the centre of the city, if you refused to pay it would take three to four years, if at all.

A few select businessmen secured, by way of bribes and intimidation, monopolies on products and services and became hugely wealthy while the majority of people - mainly those unable to adapt to a modern, capitalist world after years of communism - struggled to survive. Poverty was extreme, street crime was rampant and nobody could be trusted.

It was against this backdrop that I was first asked to go to Moscow and work alongside a Russian bodyguard team providing security and protection to the UK director of a big, US based, multi-national bank.

Opening a bank for a Russian citizen was a relatively simple process and many Russian entrepreneurs also owned banks as it provided an ideal and fairly legitimate method of laundering huge amounts of cash. But the laws surrounding foreign banking were (and still are) immensely complex and, at that time, there were almost no foreign owned banks in Russia. Few outsiders were willing or able to successfully venture into this confusing, volatile and enormously unpredictable market. However my client was extremely interested and, before embarking on further analysis and detailed investigation, wanted to go to Russia and examine for himself the possibilities and potential.

The trip would be for two days and three nights during which the client had a variety of appointments and meetings where he would be discussing and exploring the possibility of foreign banking opportunities in this new, free market economy. It was also a perfect opportunity for him to visit a country he had always dreamt about visiting.

Shortly after returning from the Balkans, Alan, an ex-SAS soldier, had started up Global Response, a new security company based in London. His company had the security contract with this particular bank. Alan wanted to do the job himself but he had other equally important contractual commitments as well as an office to run, and so handed this contract to me. We knew each other extremely well. For almost two years we had worked closely together in the Balkans. Prior to that we had also completed a small number of other close protection contracts together and back in 1988, while I was working in the pubs and clubs in Norwich, it was Alan who originally talked me into attending his SAS

six-week CP training course. Alan introduced me into the world of close protection and we both knew I was more than capable.

Alan had put the logistic and operational support systems in place and a few weeks prior to the operation I had applied for my visa. A host Russian security company 'Centurion' had been identified as a major player in the industry and were contacted via an interpreter in London. A few days prior to departure I was instructed to attend a meeting with 'the principle' (the client) in London and personally brief him on the operation.

Apart from the occasional cash withdrawals at the counter of my local branch, I had no other contact with anyone who had any remote connections to the banking world and imagined all high level bankers to be stiff-lipped, starched collared prudes. I was pleasantly surprised when I was introduced to Mr A, my principle. He was down-to-earth, unpretentious, and normal and from the onset we seemed to get on really well. He had been born in England but moved to the US when he was very young and had lived there ever since. His one great ambition was to visit Moscow and so this trip gave him the ideal opportunity of fulfilling a lifetime's dream, while at the same time undertaking a little business. He gave me his provisional itinerary and asked that I try to allocate a few hours at the end of the trip for some sightseeing - he really wanted to see Red Square. At that time I knew very little about Russia and at that preliminary first meeting we found ourselves chatting more about this new, exciting world than we did about the actual security operation.

I arrived in Moscow one full day before the principle was due to arrive and was met at the airport by the Managing Director of Centurion and his personal team of bodyguards. At that time, owning a security company in Moscow wasn't easy either - security companies protected their clients against the Mafia, which the Mafia certainly resented. By infiltrating security companies the Mafia could then indirectly extort from their wealthy clients. It was said that before the 1998 crisis at least seventy-five percent of all security companies were Mafia controlled and the risks to the owners of the few legitimate non-Mafia controlled security companies were comparable to most other top businesses.

Although I had just spent almost two years in the war-torn Balkans and had experienced hostilities at their most savage, Russia was a totally new environment and a completely new experience. As I confidently shook hands with the director and made our way outside, I felt a little nervous - although I tried not to show it. I was ushered into a gleaming new Mercedes, parked with its identical back-up vehicle in a no-parking

zone. Before jumping in I noticed one of the bodyguards quickly shake hands with the policeman and craftily popped something into his side trouser pocket. So this is the way things are done over here, I thought to myself.

Obviously I had never worked with a Russian bodyguard team before and therefore I spoke no Russian so we travelled in silence to the office. Alan had told me that an interpreter, provided by the security company, would be waiting for us when we arrived at their headquarters. As we made our way from the airport into the city centre, I stared uncomfortably out of the window at the mile upon mile of shabby communist apartment blocks, the run down confusing looking shop fronts and at the hoards of battered and bashed Ladas and Volgas crowding the pot-holed, bumpy roads, spewing their filth into the atmosphere. It was a new world, and what a world it was! I was fascinated, it was like nothing I imagined and I could sense I was going to be enthralled by this new experience; firstly of working in Russia and secondly with working as part of a Russian bodyguard team. The Balkans had taught me a lot and I was no longer a naive novice - I felt I could hold my own amongst some of the best bodyguards in the world. Little did I know that this job was going to be the first of many and I would go on to a unique love/hate relationship with the country and its people. Russia would end up enticing me into its crazy, mad, unpredictable world off and on for many years to come.

We arrived at the barricaded offices of Centurion. The huge metal gated entrance to the compound was patrolled by fully-armed guards wearing weighty bullet-proof vests and carrying their Kalashnikovs half raised. The high perimeter fence was topped with roll after roll of razor wire. As we approached, the heavy metal gates were immediately swung open and we drove in and parked alongside a fleet of about ten other top-of-the-range BMW and Mercedes. Centurion was obviously doing extremely well protecting Russia’s new rich.

The translator was my very first introduction to the delights of Russian women. Her name was Jane, she was only nineteen years old and she was slim and gorgeous. Although Jane had no security experience, she had just finished a college degree in linguistics. Her father was one of the top bodyguards for the company and he was tasked to be the team-leader on this operation. Although she got an excellent grade at University, like most Russians she had never actually been out of the country and had only spoken to a native English speaker just a handful of times throughout the four years she spent studying. When she

heard from her father that Centurion was doing its first foreign contract and that a foreign bodyguard would be travelling from England, she hounded her father for the job. And I was certainly glad she got it.

Immaculately dressed and overflowing with politeness, she met us at the entrance and escorted us through the main reception area and down a short corridor into the lavish offices to meet the Big Boss; an ex KGB director and very well connected to the very top officials in the Russian government, Jane stressed.

We shook hands warmly and we all smiled and exchanged greetings and small talk and I was then shown to a plush, deep-filled leather seat and offered sweet black tea. As Jane slowly translated word by word, sentence by sentence I was desperately trying to concentrate on what was said rather than her bright red- lipsticked lips pouting seductively at me. Jane told me that this was to be Centurion's first ever foreign contract and they were extremely pleased to be working with an English security company. I replied by saying I was also very pleased to be working with them; it was going to be an experience I would never forget!

As I sat in the opulence of the boss's office, I couldn't help wondering who in reality was actually behind the company as it was evident that their resources were vast. Was Centurion backed by the Mafia like so many other security companies at that time? Was Mafia money disappearing into Centurion's obviously overflowing coffers? Was there anything more on their agenda apart from serving and protecting their clients?

The big boss asked if I wanted to look around the building, I eagerly said yes - it would be very interesting to see the differences between a security company in the UK and in Moscow.

'First the armoury,' the boss said proudly with a huge grin on his chubby round face.

We all left the main building and ambled across the courtyard into a much smaller separate building. The wooden front door opened to a set of heavy iron barred gates atop steep concrete steps leading down to a well lit basement. We were met at the bottom by the eager, effervescent and equally as proud armourer called Andrey. Andrey the armourer's job was to look after, service and maintain all the weapons. I stared, amazed, at row upon row of handguns and AK47s lining the far wall of the otherwise sparse basement. In one corner I noticed a massive, heavy padlocked metal cabinet.

'What is in there?' I asked Jane who turned to the boss and translated.

‘Come,’ Andrey said in English and cheerfully patted my shoulder as we wandered over. As Andrey chatted to Jane she translated, telling me about Andrey’s job of maintaining all the weapons; cleaning and servicing them and keeping strict control on their use. He pointed to a large, red book on an otherwise empty desk, where he meticulously logged each weapon and each round (bullet) in and out of the armoury. At the cabinet he searched through the bunch of keys in his hand and quickly found a large ominous looking key. He opened both doors to the cabinet at once revealing about twenty sub-machine guns neatly lined up in a designated slot behind a thin holding rail.

At that time I knew little about firearm laws in Russia but I did understand that these guys must indeed be very well connected if they were allowed to hold as much weaponry. Only in the Balkans had I ever seen so much fire-power outside a barracks. As the boss proudly described the work they did and the services they provided, Jane translated without expression, as though discussing weapons and fire-power and bullets and guns and death was a normal everyday occurrence. As I carefully handled each weapon, looking over them carefully and intricately as though they were sacred, delicate gemstones and not lethal weapons of war, I knew it was going to be a real pleasure working with these guys.

After reluctantly handing the weapons back to Andrey the armourer, we returned to the main building for a quick look around the rest of the office facilities and their control room, and then back to the boss’s office for more tea and to discuss the operation in detail.

It was a fairly simple job to plan, as essentially it would involve mainly escorting the principle to and from the hotel to meetings and appointments at various pre-arranged locations in and around Moscow. There would also be evening dinner engagements and, if there was time at the end of the visit, sightseeing at Red Square. We would have two primary vehicles, a recon vehicle and a fourth vehicle on permanent standby. I would be staying alongside the client more or less 24/7 and would be sleeping at the same hotel in an adjoining room. We would need a team of five; the team-leader (Jane’s father), and four other BGs, one or two of whom would also carry out any advance reconnaissance work as and when required. A day before I left for Moscow I was sent a basic agenda from the client’s office, but was told that this would probably change - the final schedule would be given to the team leader and he would then have to organise and re-organise the operation accordingly.

Bodyguards should never work in any hostile or unfamiliar territory without the backup of a local team and working in Russia was no exception. Centurion had access to all areas; the blue lights on all their vehicles meant they could more or less go anywhere and at anytime without ever being stopped by the local Militia. They knew Moscow intimately; the routes, the airports, the medical facilities, evacuation procedures, emergency services, and had a vast network of influential contacts to cover almost any unexpected eventuality. All their management team, without exception, were higher ranking officers in the Russian Special Forces or former KGB agents, and all their BGs were former Spetsnaz soldiers licensed to carry a variety of weapons, either overtly or covertly. These guys were all really hard men and took their job extremely seriously. The risks were just too great and the consequences of even a single mistake were too catastrophic to contemplate.

Although he wasn't going to be on our team as he was currently on another assignment, I was briefly introduced to Alex who apparently had been former USSR President Gorbachov's own personal bodyguard for much of his presidency. I was also introduced to Nicholas who, as Jane cautiously and carefully translated, had been a very important person at the KGB's notorious Lublianka prison - Lublianka was where untold thousands of 'enemies of the state' had been imprisoned, tortured and killed during the Soviet era. As I sternly shook hands with Alex and Nicholas I wondered what unique and undoubtedly amazing stories they have secretly stored in their minds, and the incredible (and horrific) things they must have experienced. Feeling slightly intimidated I could tell there and then that Russian bodyguards were undoubtedly some of the best in the world, and I understood that working alongside all of these guys, even if it was just for a few days, was going to be an incredible experience and I should learn as much as I possibly could.

Jane's father detailed the procedures they had already put in place for the operation. I listened intently as Jane translated. All primary and secondary routes to and from each proposed location on the principle's itinerary had already been carefully planned, all locations thoroughly inspected and access points fully prepared. This was their first foreign contract and they were leaving nothing to chance. The importance of this contract was immense; should anything happen to a foreigner whilst in their care could not only destroy their credibility, but quite possibly their entire business. Although at that time the Russian government wasn't particularly welcoming to foreigners, it desperately needed foreign

investment and any major incident to any foreigner in Moscow could also damage the faith all foreigners were starting to show in the country.

After the extremely detailed and comprehensive briefing - which Jane tirelessly translated - and a thorough Q and A session in which I once again confirmed emergency procedures and paramedic facilities - as almost eighty percent of all incidents to clients are medical - I was taken to the hotel for a quick shower and change and then straight out to an exclusive Georgian restaurant on the outskirts of Moscow.

The restaurant's owner obviously knew Centurion extremely well as he immediately deserted the customers he was talking to and rushed over to greet us. A private dining room had been reserved and we were served by a squadron of immaculately dressed and incredibly polite waiters and waitresses, all buzzing around us like flies. I had no idea what I was eating and just said yes to whatever I was offered. Toasts for long mutually beneficial business relationships were given, although I tried not to drink - I would never usually drink before an operation - admittedly just a few tiny sips of mighty strong and amazingly tasty vodka managed to unintentionally slither down my throat.

As the drivers and bodyguards waited with the vehicles outside, my usual pre-operation anxiety had all but disappeared and I dined like a king. And I loved every minute of it.

The following day the principle was due to arrive. I woke up very early giving myself plenty of time to prepare and eat a good breakfast - as I wouldn't know what time I would be eating again. I then returned to my room, carefully checked everything once again, meticulously ironed all my shirts and buffed my already very clean shoes.

The team turned up at the hotel three hours before the principle was due to arrive. One of the team would stay behind and check the principle's room just prior to his arrival. As a decoy Alan had booked both rooms an extra night, both before and after the principle's arrival and departure date. Once I had checked in, I then swapped rooms without notifying the hotel - I was now in the principle's room and he would be staying in mine. I had also slept with the room's adjoining door wide open and an empty glass bottle balanced precariously on the door-handle to both rooms - just in case anyone tried to enter at night. A trick I had picked up from a friend in the Balkans.

At Sheremetyevo airport we parked in the 'no-parking' zone and were met by the Head of Airport Security. Centurion had arranged for him to take me and the team leader to meet the principle directly at the arrival's gate. As I was swiftly escorted by the Head of Airport Security

through the back corridors to the gate, I wondered how much he had been bribed - as this could never happen at any other airport in the world. But it didn't matter, I was already impressed with Centurion and the principle hadn't yet arrived.

I stood waiting for my client at the doors to the aircraft. After an initial brief introduction, he was ushered non-stop through passport control and customs. With just a cursory passport and visa check and brief customs clearance, we were whisked out of the airport to the Mercedes and line of immaculately dressed bodyguards waiting with car-doors open, and sped swiftly from the airport to the hotel. I could see he was stunned.

Once inside the vehicle and without being too over-the-top, I summarised the operation and briefed him on procedures and emergency protocol. I instructed the principle to call me 'Robin' at all times, unless there was a real emergency and then he should call me 'Mr Barratt'. If he called me 'Mr Barratt' I would instantly know he was in big trouble and needed immediate emergency assistance. I briefed him of the EMP (emergency meeting points) we had identified at the hotel - in the extremely unlikely event that we were separated - and stressed that I would continually keep him updated on any changes, alterations or developments throughout those three days. In a country like Russia things can suddenly change. I took the photocopies of his passport and visa and life insurance documents which I had instructed his office to copy for me before he left. I also took a copy of his private emergency contact numbers: his office and all his immediate family. With the exception of just a couple of minor changes the principle confirmed the schedule given to me earlier by his office.

As I had already pre-checked him in, once we arrived at the hotel we went straight up to his room. The BG had finished a thorough room inspection and was standing in the corridor with the door open. On arrival in Russia, all foreigners need their visa registering and so, leaving the principle to shower and freshen up and the BG standing on guard outside his door, I took his passport to the hotel reception to have it registered.

As per itinerary, that evening he dined at Pushkin's café on Nevsky Prospect just off Tverskaya. Sumptuously decorated in velvet drapes, marble columns, parquet flooring and frescoed ceilings, this rose-colored neoclassical structure was named after Russia's revered poet Alexander Pushkin and voted one of the best restaurants in the world. I waited near the entrance to the dining room with the principle in full view, while the

rest of the team waited with the vehicles outside. Because Pushkin's café attracted the famous and the very wealthy, security was tight. The restaurant was used to bodyguards hovering around their clients. The restaurant manager stressed to me in perfect English that my client was perfectly safe and I could either wait outside with the other bodyguards or in a separate small room set aside for security teams, but it was my first evening with my client and I didn't want to let him out of my sight. In general, the protocol at restaurants with clients could vary depending upon the venue and the instructions from the client. Sometimes we would sit with a coffee at a table nearby, keeping the principle more or less at arm's reach. If the evening was long, we could occasionally eat ourselves. But at a restaurant such as Pushkin's café, where tables had to be booked weeks in advance and the revenue per sitting was extremely high, most bodyguards had to be content with waiting around nearby.

Throughout his visit to Moscow, the principle had a full schedule of meetings and conferences at various locations around the city, as well as at the hotel where a meeting room had been reserved for the duration of his stay. He seemed extremely happy with the whole operation and said he felt completely safe and secure - which is the best compliment any bodyguard could ever have. Centurion did an excellent job; every location was thoroughly checked in advance - one of the BG team would always be at each and every destination, sometimes hours in advance, to carefully survey the surroundings and to make sure there were no hidden surprises. Routes were checked and checked again. Because of the driver's detailed knowledge of Moscow, places where there were delays or hold-ups were almost always avoided. Remarkably, considering the appalling road conditions and the unashamed madness of Moscow's drivers, not once did any other vehicle come in-between the convoy. On major thoroughfares, however, we 'centre-laned' with flashing blue lights so no-one came anywhere near us anyway.

At the end of a very long last day, as I escorted him back to his hotel room, he confirmed that he would definitely like a few hours sightseeing the next day before departure. His dream, he said, was to stand in Red Square and he informed me that he had organised for an English speaking Russian banking colleague to join us in the morning.

I didn't like the fact that, without initial consultation with me, the principle had arranged for someone we hadn't vetted to be so close to him in a public place. It was different at meetings in offices where the environment was controlled and anyone not known or recognised would

immediately be suspicious. His colleague could in fact be a ‘pointer’ - someone (or something) that is used to identify a target.

The principle must have seen the concern on my face. ‘Don’t worry, he is all right,’ he said casually. Even though the Principle thought that he was ‘all right’ I would certainly be keeping a very keen eye on his every movement, as well as on the environment around me. I didn’t like unscheduled arrangements and meetings, they always made me nervous.

Once the principle was back in his hotel room I forwarded the details to Jane via the radio. Because I spoke no Russian and the team spoke no English, communication to the rest of the BG team was made via Jane, who manned the radio every minute of every day throughout the entire operation. During the day she would be stationed in Centurion’s control room, when she went to the toilet she popped the radio into her pocket and she slept with it next to her at night. Although Centurion assured me their communication systems were encrypted and secure, it certainly wasn’t an ideal way of communicating and obviously the only potential flaw in an otherwise pretty perfect and secure operation. But because of the language difficulties it seemed the only option available to us at that time. During the communist era hardly anyone had the opportunity to learn another language or to travel or meet foreigners and back in 1993 most people still didn’t speak much English, the only exceptions were those working in western hotels or travel agencies or, because of their job, had to deal directly with foreigners. It was sometimes awkward not to give specific times or places over the airwaves but thankfully there were only a few minor variations to the pre-arranged schedule, and any changes could generally be detailed with relative simplicity. For instance instead of detailing a specific new ETA (estimated time of arrival) I would just say ‘one hour later than scheduled time.’ But despite this, the entire security operation went smoothly and professionally with no hiccups - until the very last few hours.

In order to catch the British Airways flight back to London, we were scheduled to depart from the hotel at 11.30 in the morning. I would personally be seeing the principle directly into the British Airways VIP lounge where he could wait safely until departure. Once he was in the air I would return to the office, debrief the team and, once he was out of Russian airspace, close down operations. A BG team would never fully close down operations until their principle was safely out of the locality’s airspace and part of pre-operational planning would always involve estimating the flight time and setting up a basic contingency plan should

the aircraft have to return or get diverted for any reason. The worst thing would be for the aircraft to return and have no plan in place.

I arranged for the vehicles to be outside the hotel at 9am. The principle's schedule had been full and we only had a couple of hours the morning before departure to do a bit of sightseeing. He also wanted to purchase a few gifts for his family. As I escorted the principle from his room into the foyer, I immediately recognized his Russian banking colleague, who sat waiting in the foyer. As soon as he saw us he jumped up and wished the principle a 'good morning'. I introduced myself. I recognised him from a meeting they had had earlier, but would nevertheless be keeping a close eye on him.

From the hotel we made our way in convoy to Red Square. Although strictly a 'no parking' zone the drivers parked all three vehicles on the side of the main road opposite the National Hotel at the bottom end of Tverskaya Street on the corner of Manezh Square. Myself, the principle and his banking colleague were in the middle vehicle with the full team of bodyguards split between the other two cars. I waited until the BGs were in place around the vehicle before opening the door for the principle and debussing. A BG stationed opposite opened the door for the principle's colleague. We started to walk in formation around the principle the few hundred metres across the Manezh Square to a set of ornate gates that led into Red Square. As we walked I turned to look back at the vehicles and noticed five or six Militia in animated conversation with the drivers. I wondered what was going on and thought about radioing through to Jane and asking if there were any problems. But I decided against it - Centurion had done a great job and with all their connections and authority I was sure they could sort out any problems with the local Militia. Just as we entered Red Square I glanced back again and the cars were still parked on the side of the busy road but miraculously there was not a Militia in sight.

Few Western tourists visited Moscow and we stood out like a sore thumb. Most tourists were either from other regions of Russia or visitors from other former Soviet States. During Soviet times, for Russians living in the regions, coming to Moscow for a vacation was a huge adventure and a once in a lifetime experience. Most Russians neither had the money, nor the opportunity, to travel outside their home town or village and visiting Moscow was dream few could ever realise. Once communism fell, Moscow not only attracted more tourists but also an increasing number of people trying to escape the poverty and hardship of life in the provinces. Resembling the 'gold-paved streets of London,'

Moscow drew people from all over the ex-Soviet Union - from the Ukraine and Georgia to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Often with no money, no job and nowhere to live, they swarmed into Moscow seeking their fortune. But for many the only way to survive was to beg, steal or prey on tourists and other visitors. Gypsy children would be sent out in swarms to surround the unsuspecting; snatching cameras and purses, jewellery and valuables and then dispersing in a multitude of directions making pursuit impossible. The disabled, who no longer had enough State support to exist, huddled on street corners showing off their disability or amputations in the hope of sympathy and help. The elderly, whose monthly pension no longer lasted a week and whose family had long since vanished, stood meekly with outstretched hands appealing for a few kopeks to survive. There were beggars everywhere, pestering everyone.

We had fully-armed bodyguards accompanying the principle's every move. Every BG carried a primary and secondary handgun and the lead guard carried a submachine gun strategically concealed under his long coat. Moscow was ruthless territory and we were not taking any risks, especially in the last few hours. As we ambled around Red Square, I kept a nervous watch on the both of them as well as our immediate environment, while the principle listened intently as his colleague gave him a brief historical guide of the surroundings. As I studied and assessed everyone that passed nearby, I listened as the principle's colleague spoke with enthusiasm and passion about Red Square, St Basil's Cathedral, The Saviour Tower of the Kremlin, Cathedral of the Assumption, The Kremlin and Lenin's Tomb, and the amazing façade of the GUM department store that runs the whole length of Red Square and easily puts the shop front of Harrods to shame. I was mesmerised with everything around me, things that I had only ever seen on the TV and in films. Although I desperately wanted to listen and learn, I knew I had a job to do, but felt reassured with the understanding that I would definitely be returning to Red Square later - when I had no principle to look after, and no team of bodyguards to consider.

After strolling around for thirty or forty minutes we made our way back to the vehicles and drove the short distance to Old Arbat Street. The principle wanted a few souvenirs and according to his guide Old Arbat Street was the best place to buy them. As opposed to the parallel-running, gaudy neon-lit New Arbat, Old Arbat is one of the most historical, pedestrian streets in Moscow. Russia's greatest poet Alexander Pushkin stayed there when he visited the city and Leo Tolstoy loved to

take walks along the kiosk-lined pavement, admiring at the artists and listening to the street musicians and performers.

We casually walked the length of Arbat, popping into the occasional souvenir shop and bartering with the street vendors. Everything had run smoothly and after the very brief sightseeing tour of Moscow we dashed back to the hotel where the principle made a few last minute telephone calls, collected his luggage and checked out. Arrangements to settle the account had already been made and while the principle made his final telephone calls I arranged for his luggage to be taken down to the waiting vehicles, which were parked a few metres to the left of the hotel entrance.

The drivers were already in their vehicles, the engines were running and everyone was ready to go. We had one BG waiting with me in the corridor outside the principle's room, other members of the team were in the foyer waiting for the sign that we were on the move. Getting back to the airport and onto the aircraft was the final stage of the operation.

What on earth could go wrong?

I nodded to the client as he exited and locked his room. The bodyguard with me said one brief word into his radio which informed the rest of the team we were moving. As we exited the elevators and walked through the large foyer towards the exit, I could see the cars pulling up outside the hotel entrance and the rest of the team waiting in the foyer fell into formation around the principle. With two bodyguards on the principle's left and two to his right, and me directly behind him, we exited the hotel. The lead BG dashed forward and opened the principle's car door.

As we stepped through the front doors of the hotel towards the open car door, an elderly woman stepped between the team directly towards the principle. Instantly one of the bodyguards grabbed her by the hair and yanked her backwards. Instinctively the guards closed in and we dashed the remaining few metres to the car and pushed the client inside, slamming his door shut. One of the guards drew his weapon and stood blocking the principle's door as I quickly got into the front seat. I turned to see the woman on her back on the pavement, screaming loudly, clutching her head. One of the team, with his weapon drawn, towered menacingly over her. The other bodyguards hurriedly got into the other vehicles and we quickly sped away.

'What the hell was that about?' the client asked nervously.

I was shocked but tried not to show it. My heart was pounding and I felt out of breath. 'I am not sure what happened sir,' I replied. 'I shall

find out later.'

Up until then the whole operation had been a huge success. Nothing unusual had happened throughout the entire trip - everything went exactly as planned; there were no problems, hiccups or difficulties. As we sat in silence for the forty minute trip to the airport, the principle gazed thoughtfully out of the window.

With the Airport Security Manager again by our side, we escorted the principle into the airport, checked him in and accompanied him to the British Airways First Class lounge where he waited for his flight home. On leaving he thanked me for the excellent service and asked me to contact him when I got back to England.

Once the principle was safely on board his flight home and I was back in Centurion's office for the final end of operation debriefing, I asked Jane to find out what on earth had happened. After speaking at length to her father, she eventually replied by saying that, because of the high risk of assassination and huge crime rate, absolutely everyone - no matter who they are or what they look like - is considered a potential risk. The woman was innocent but she was careless enough to step in-between a BG team - even if it was by accident - and suffered as a result. It turned out that she was a personal assistant to a Russian businessman and was on her way into the hotel for a meeting. She was shaken, and more than a little distressed, but not injured. Once the principle was out of harm's way and the bodyguard had established who she was and confirmed that she was not a threat, he made his own way back to the office, leaving her alone to recover.

As I listened disbelievingly, I wondered what would have happened in England if part of a security team had yanked an old lady to the ground by her hair. An incident like that would have definitely made front-page headlines and every news programme. The security team would have probably been sacked and quite possibly even arrested for assault and the woman would almost certainly sue. How incredibly different Moscow was to England. In Russia there was little accountability and virtually no liability - you could more or less do whatever you wanted and get away with.

I decided to stay in Russia an extra couple of days. I wanted to see a little more of magnificent Moscow and persuaded Jane to show me around. On my last evening Jane showed me considerably more than I expected (and Russian women have been a fascination for me ever since!).

A few days after returning home I made an appointment with Mr A, my principle, and debriefed him on his stay, the security operation and the episode at the hotel. He listened intently, a little shocked and upset but ultimately thankful that we didn't take any risks. I eventually went onto to take Mr A to Moscow a further six times until, contrary to what he believed, his Board of Directors in America decided that setting up a foreign subsidiary of their bank in Moscow was a risk they were not willing to take. Actually they were ultimately right; in 1998 Russia's economy collapsed - the rouble was devalued, hundreds of banks closed, redundancies and unemployment soared and overnight foreign investment virtually stopped. Most foreigners pulled out of the country and went home.

Bodyguarding In The Ukraine

Each and every close protection operation I have ever been on in the former Soviet Union, has always without exception, had an unusual predicament or problem to resolve. For some strange reason nothing ever seems to go to according to plan and if, by the end of the contract, things seemed to have gone a little too smoothly, I just knew that something was going to happen. Although thankfully nothing drastic has ever happened to my principle while on my watch, on occasions I have certainly had to deal with some pretty difficult and very unique situations.

On one occasion in late 2001 we were taking a Swedish pop star into the Ukraine for a concert. The Ukraine was once part of the Soviet Union and achieved its independence on the 24th of August 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. Although fairly unknown in the UK and the West, the pop-star had a huge following throughout most of Eastern Europe. I had never been to the Ukraine and heard it was quite beautiful. The destination was the coastal city of Odessa on the Black Sea. As a teenager I remember reading The Odessa File by Frederick Forsyth and, although in the book Odessa was the name of a Nazi network planning to destroy Israel and not the Ukrainian city as I had originally thought, it conjured vivid and exciting images of Cold War Eastern Europe and the name stuck with me as exotic and interesting and a place I would definitely like to visit.

I flew to Stockholm a couple of days prior to the operation and met up with Pavao, my colleague and friend, who worked for the principle full-time as Head of Security. I had known Pavao for many years and he had instructed on many of the close protection training courses I had run for the Worldwide Federation of Bodyguards. A few months previously,

on a training course in Iceland, I had mentioned to Pavao that I would love to work with him on one of his operations, as I had never worked within the celebrity sector and was interested in learning a little more about that side of close protection. Pavao promised me that I could join him on his next operation abroad. Although I wouldn't get paid for it, I agreed to go - I didn't worry about the money, I just wanted the experience.

Pavao was the principle's permanent bodyguard and had previously travelled with him to the Ukraine as well as to other former Soviet Union countries including Russia, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), as well as to Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan where, I was told, the principle had an even stronger following. I was baffled as to how a Swedish pop star, unknown in western Europe could be so popular in countries like Kazakhstan - how do you even start to market your music to these fairly uninviting and relatively obscure places?

Although apprehensive, I was looking forward to the experience as this was going to be a totally new and interesting undertaking for me - not only was I visiting a country I had always wanted to visit, but it was my first job in the celebrity sector of the industry, up until then I had limited myself to just working within the corporate world. I preferred the set structure and detailed planning of the corporate environment rather than the frequently haphazard, topsy-turvy and disorganised world of celebrities. Pavao was the opposite. He loved working with celebrities, even though they would frequently be hours late for appointments, pay little regard to schedules and plans and be out of their tiny heads most of the time in a drug filled world of their own. From the stories my colleague had told me about his client I wasn't sure whether I was actually going to enjoy the following couple of days. Apparently, the principle liked to drink heavily, enjoy occasional (well, more than occasional) recreational drugs, and frequently, because of his loud mouth and arrogance, get himself into awkward and often very uncompromising situations.

'It is often challenging,' Pavao remarked with a sly, knowing grin.

We sat over a couple of non-alcoholic beers in his apartment discussing the forthcoming operation. As he popped a video into the player Pavao said; 'I want you to look at this.' He spoke perfect English, Croatian, German and of course spoke Swedish fluently. He also spoke basic Russian and a little Ukrainian. I sat back, sipped my beer and watched Pavao's home movie. The video was one of those very rare occasions when an attack on the principle had actually been recorded. A

year previously he had taken the same client to Moscow. The concert was at the Central Lenin Stadium in Luzhniki, a suburb of Moscow. With a total seating capacity of 81,029 seats; it was the biggest sports stadium in the whole of Russia. The stadium was used mainly by Torpedo Luzhniki and Spartak Moscow for football matches, but occasionally as a venue for major concerts.

The stage was at the far end of the stadium and, because a football match was scheduled to be played the following day, hundreds of police and Russian Special Forces were employed jointly by the record company and the stadium to cordon off the pitch. They literally stood side by side all the way round the playing field keeping the crowds confined to the stands. However, being typically Russian and not particularly well organised, most of the police were actually looking towards the stage and the concert and not out at the audience! We sat and watched the video as the camera shakily followed the principle and his gorgeous, and very scantily clad dancers as they left the stage to sing closer to the thousands of ecstatic revellers.

The audience, jam-packed behind the rows of police, cheered and screamed and clapped as the principle and his dancers approached. Although focusing primarily on the principle, now and then the camera also caught Pavao in the background as he ran backwards and forwards following the principle's footsteps as he teased and tormented his fans. Suddenly, in the corner of the frame someone broke through the cordon of Militia and made a mad dash towards the principle. The principle was totally engrossed with his performance and was completely unaware that someone was rapidly approaching from the side. The cameraman had noticed however and focused on the man as he drew nearer. Pavao suddenly noticed him and bolted over, elbowing him hard in the face and throwing him immediately to the ground. As soon as Pavao floored the intruder he instantly returned to his principle's side. After a few seconds ten or fifteen Militia realised that someone had just broken through their not-very-secure cordon and charged at the floored hapless intruder and ruthlessly beat him with their batons. The camera followed them as they dragged him off the pitch by his legs. Amazingly the principle only found out about the incident much later when he was shown the video.

As I finished the bland tasting non-alcoholic beer, I wondered what I had let myself in for. What were the following couple of days going to bring?

At 11am the following morning we met the principle and his entourage at his record company's head office in the centre of the

gorgeous island city of Stockholm. Apart from the incredibly ugly Norrmalm centre, which is centred on the unsightly Sergels Torg Island, Stockholm is said to be one of the most beautiful capitals in the world - a stunning, unique archipelago of over 24,000 islands on the Baltic Sea at the bottom of the Gulf of Bothnia and a short ferry ride to Finland. The previous afternoon - before watching Pavao's home video - we had spent a couple of hours casually wandering around the old streets of the city. I had hoped that after the contract I would have the time to do a bit of sightseeing and perhaps catch a ferry over to Finland - another country I had not yet visited. In the nineteenth century, Finland was under Swedish rule, and then it was Russian, and it finally got its independence from the old Soviet Union in 1917. I had heard that the countryside was wonderful, but - more importantly - the Finnish women were supposed to be simply stunning. I had not yet had the delightful opportunity of listening to the soft moans of 'kyllä' or - more likely - the loud shouts of 'nyt, jättää!'

During the pre-departure briefing it was confirmed that there would be twelve other people on the same trip; the other band members, two dancers, technical support, the record company's Swedish representative, the principle's manager and his personal assistant. The other Swedish stage crew were already on site and local support services were Ukrainian. Pavao was in charge of running the entire security operation for the trip, and we would be working in conjunction with a local Ukrainian security company which he had previously worked with. Although important to Pavao and to the operation, the amount of people on the trip and the logistics of the actual concert didn't concern me - I was only there to provide extra support and help when and where necessary. Having me there gave Pavao the unique opportunity to concentrate on other security related issues which he would not normally have the time for.

After the briefing we all travelled together in a convoy of cars and luxury minibuses to Stockholm's Bromma airport, just a short ride from the city centre. Bromma is used mainly for domestic flights and private aircraft. Pavao and I were in a coach with the principle and band members, everyone else followed in convoy closely behind. We arrived at the airport and quickly boarded the Gulf Stream private jet that the record company had chartered for the trip. It was going to be a quick in and out operation. The plan was to arrive late afternoon and travel from the airport directly to the stadium for a sound check. After the sound check we would all then go to a local hotel for food and refreshments.

Although we were not staying overnight, a few rooms had been reserved for the band to prepare themselves prior to the concert. At 8pm, the plan was to then travel back to the stadium for the evening performance. After the show we would then go directly back to the airport for the brief flight home.

It was going to be such a brief operation what on earth could go wrong?

After an enjoyable flight in the luxury of the Gulf Stream, we arrived at the tiny airport of Odessa and were immediately met by the local security service provider all of whom surprisingly spoke fairly good English. Pavao had already planned and arranged everything and I was told that there was nothing for me to do apart from keep a close eye on the principle. My brief was to stay by his side at all times unless instructed by Pavao in person, and I was to ignore any requests or instructions by anyone else, even from the principle or his management. There were hundreds of 'unknowns' on an operation of this kind and keeping a very strict chain of command was vital. I must admit I wasn't used to keeping quiet and not having to sort things out and had to check myself a number of times as I found myself wanting to confirm and re-confirm arrangements and procedures.

The Ukrainian airport officials were as bad, if not worse, than the Russians. Apart from the Ukrainian security company, airport officials did not allow private vehicles or welcoming committees onto the tarmac so, after we all disembarked from the aircraft, we were more or less frog-marched the twenty or so metres to the tiny terminal building. Everyone then queued as the stern, sour-faced, Soviet-era, Passport Control Officer checked the pile of passports and visas handed to him by one of the record company's administrators. Another even sterner faced Customs Officer, who was obviously very unhappy with the type of people they were now letting into their country, rummaged impolitely through the occasional piece of luggage. Once the formalities of entering the country were over we exited to a welcoming committee of Ukrainian record company big-wigs, local officials, hanger's-on and lots and lots of fans - many of whom were holding large bouquets of flowers. After what seemed like hours, but was in fact only about ten minutes, we were finally ushered outside to the waiting vehicles.

With a police escort, flashing lights, sirens and a convoy of six vehicles, we made our subtle way to the stadium. In an instant I learned that the theory of blending in was certainly not applicable to celebrity protection. This was about as high profile as you could possibly get.

As I sat in the front of the minibus listening to the band warming up, I wondered what all the fuss was about. The principle was certainly a real character; very loud, very animated, very dynamic and eccentric but I was confused as to how someone with a voice like an old dying crow could be so popular. But, I suppose, anything was possible in Eastern Europe. As they warmed up the principle frequently reprimanded the other band members for being slightly out of tune or not in perfect harmony (although to my ears he was more out of tune than all of them put together). Pavao was right, the principle did have a really bad attitude and was annoying and extremely arrogant and I quickly understood what he meant when he said the principle could be a real pain in the arse.

Having me by his side meant that Pavao could plan and prepare a lot more than he would normally be able to. A certain amount of preparation is always necessary, even on a one-day operation, but there is only so much you can do when you are the only foreign bodyguard in an unfamiliar country. A lot has to be left to the host security team. The Ukrainian security company we were working with had already prepared the routes and reconnoitred the locations in advance; airport, stadium and hotel. To maintain some sort of consistency, they were also providing front of house, front of stage and perimeter security, and armed escorts to and from the hotel. Pavao had worked with them on a previous trip so he knew that they were esteemed players in the Ukrainian security industry, but on operation he is as paranoid as I am and everything must be absolutely perfect and planned to the infinite degree, and of course nobody can ever do it as well as you can do it yourself. Pavao trusted me and therefore he could leave the principle in my care and check other aspects of security knowing that his client was in safe hands. While Pavao went through the evacuation procedures with the stadium management and surveyed backstage, dressing rooms, entrance and exit points, I stood by the side of the stage as the principle squawked and screeched his way through the sound check .Although theoretically a closed set, it was still extremely important to keep a constant close eye on the environment as in these countries money talks and at entrances and exits venue security can very easily be bribed to turn a blind eye.

The sound check went well; the journey back to the hotel went without incident. The brief stay at the hotel and the meal all passed relatively smoothly. While everyone in the group relaxed and prepared for the concert, Pavao and I remained on edge and constantly alert. There is always a huge commotion surrounding most celebrities on tour, especially when they go to regions and countries rarely visited by tourists

and foreigners. Everyone wanted a little piece of the party, a glimpse of the principle, an autograph, from the fans to those contracted to supply support most were in awe of what was going on.

Although there were twelve in the group from Sweden, there were probably an extra twenty or so local hangers on - guests, friends of the record company and promoter, friends of the hotel manager and some of the most beautiful groupies I have ever seen, and I could understand how easy it might be for groupies to bribe themselves past the perimeter security.

The atmosphere was electric, everyone seemed to know each other and somehow it seemed everybody had security passes; who they were and where they came from I could only guess. But I kept telling myself that it wasn't my problem, my priority was to keep a close eye on the principle which wasn't easy - everyone around him seemed completely off their heads, especially the Ukrainians. While Pavao and I kept as close to the principle as we could without invading his personal space too much, the music blared, the drinks flowed and the party continued.

After a couple of hour's pre-concert festivities everyone was finally instructed to return to the vehicles and the convoy was again escorted by the police back to the stadium.

When the principle appeared on stage the roar of the crowd was completely deafening. Concerts were a rare occurrence in Odessa and the crowd went completely mad. At just under 30,000 people, we were told the stadium was at full capacity. My colleague and I stood in the two front corners of the stage scouring the crowd, keeping our eyes open for anything unusual, but to me everything seemed unusual. Because of the intensity of the stage lights, looking out into the crowd was extremely uncomfortable and enormously difficult and the pounding of the speakers nearby rocked every fibre in my body.

I wished I was some place else, somewhere isolated, peaceful and quiet.

I concentrated as much as I could on the heaving, deranged crowd directly in front of me, occasionally glancing over at Pavao to check that everything was all right. Because the music was so unbelievably loud, it was virtually impossible to communicate using the radios, even with sealed ear-pieces. As I stood what was for me one of the worst places in the world, I thought what a total contrast this operation was to the previous one where I was sitting in the bar of a first class hotel in Moscow, listening to sophisticated classical music from the hotel's pianist while my client conducted a civilised polite business meeting

over a lengthy lunch. As the music pounded and the principle screamed his way through his performance, I knew I definitely would not be working with too many more celebrities.

It seemed to me that the concert would never end. After the first encore I had hoped that was that and we could all pack up and go home, but the principle thought otherwise - he was enjoying himself too much and refused to leave. Much to my intense frustration he returned to the stage a further three times and I had to endure almost twenty more minutes of pounding, deafening nonsense. Finally my colleague gave me the nod that indicated it was the end of the concert and we fell in behind the principle and his entourage as they made their way off the stage and back down the narrow corridor to his dressing room.

'Thank fuck that's over.' I said to Pavao as we waited outside the principle's door.

'So you didn't like it much? he replied laughing, knowing I hated every single minute.

I just grinned menacingly. No I didn't enjoy it. In fact I thought it was awful but it was a unique experience and I would continue to be as professional as I could and learn what I could, even though I secretly hoped never to work for any celebrity again. I couldn't understand how Pavao enjoyed this kind of work. For me, standing in the corner of a stage with the piercing lights and painful music and the stench of thirty thousand sweaty Ukrainians wafting up my nose was not an environment I could take pleasure in. Not to mention the pre-pubescent behaviour of almost everyone in the crew. The only good thing was the beauty of the Ukrainian women; from the groupies and backstage crew to the screaming crowds in the audience, each and every one of them were stunning - I didn't notice one ugly female face! The Ukraine would be another place on my ever increasing list of places to go and nationalities to shag.

After about an hour of post-concert celebrations in the dressing room, lots more alcohol and possibly drugs secretly supplied by the Ukrainians, we were finally on our way back to the airport. The tour manager had radioed to the aircraft telling them that we were on our way and to start the pre-flight checks. All we had to do was arrive at the airport, get through passport control and customs and onto our aircraft for the short trip home.

What on earth could go wrong?

It was true, most of the group was drunk and high but it was a private aircraft and so passenger safety wasn't going to be too much of

an issue as there were no sober passengers to consider anyway. Following an extremely embarrassing incident in Asia a couple of years previously and some extremely intimate and very unorthodox body searches, the band knew never to take any drugs through customs again. They had also been warned again before departing Sweden for this trip and I could imagine that a Ukrainian airport was certainly not a particularly good place to be caught with drugs either.

Once we entered the tiny terminal building the police left the convoy; there was no need for them to stay with us any longer, the airport was empty, there were no crowds or well-wishers; we were on our way home. All we had to do was just to get onto the plane and in the air. As I stood with Pavao, the principle and the band waiting to complete passport and customs clearance, I looked over to see the tour manager in a rather animated conversation with an incredibly grumpy looking female official sitting at what looked like a makeshift wooden Check-In desk. Pavao also noticed and, while he kept close to the principle who was larking around drunkenly with the rest of the group, told me to go over as see what the problem was. As I approached, the tour manager turned to me and, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, said that the official wanted to see all our tickets. I almost burst out laughing.

'Tickets?' I howled disbelievingly.

'This is our aircraft.' I turned and said to her slowly in broken English. 'We- don't-need-tickets-for-our-own-aircraft.' I smiled.

'I-want-see-tickets,' she said in a stern unbending manner that I had heard time and time again during my trips to Russia. Most of the older generation of ex-communists had little idea about thinking for themselves; they feared the unknown and uncompromisingly did precisely whatever they were told. The fear of the consequences meant they would never, ever consider waiving from their orders and this woman had obviously been ordered not to let anyone board any aircraft without a ticket - she had probably never even seen a private aircraft.

'We-don't-need-tickets,' I barked, 'this-is-our-aircraft!'

The rest of the group, high and drunk and messing around were standing right behind me. The principle poked his head through the crowd and shouted: 'Tell her to fuck off!'

Everyone jeered and laughed and patted him on the back. I could see this was quickly turning into a disaster which at any minute could turn really nasty.

The principle then pushed everyone to one side and attempted to walk straight past this stubborn official. Suddenly, from no-where we

were surrounded by uniformed officials brandishing their weapons screaming at us.

The old lady stood up from her desk and shouted ‘I-want-see-your-tickets.’

Pavao quickly came forward and I stepped away and back over towards my angry and suddenly very nervous principle.

‘We don’t need tickets,’ he said to her calmly and quietly, looking around at the nervous officials pointing their weapons at us. Everyone had suddenly become very quiet. They were all shitting themselves. I was too. In just a few minutes things seemed to have got totally out of control and I could visualise all of us behind bars in a squalid Ukrainian prison.

‘You don’t need tickets to get onto your own aircraft.’ Pavao said again, hoping his coolness and subtle insistence would finally get through to her.

It didn’t.

She shrugged.

The nasty looking Militia obviously seemed to want to shoot a few stupid Swedes who evidently thought that because we were Western and famous we were therefore above the law. An even nastier looking officer pushed passed us and demanded to know what was going on. Again Pavao calmly tried to explain that because it was our aircraft and we didn’t pay for seats we therefore didn’t need tickets to board. But the officer ignored Pavao’s logic and confirmed with a typically belligerent, aggressive attitude that we could not board any aircraft in the Ukraine without tickets.

The tour manager asked to see someone in charge.

‘I am in charge.’ The officer replied.

‘We want to see the airport manager’

‘He asleep. He gone home. It is late. I am in charge’

It wasn’t looking good. Everyone was getting very agitated. We were surrounded by armed guards, our aircraft was just a few hundred metres away on the tarmac warming up, waiting for us and yet we were stuck in the terminal building because we didn’t have tickets to board our own fucking aircraft.

While one of the Swedish assistants tried to contact the pilot and another tried to call the aircraft lease company back in Sweden, I heard Pavao say to the officer, ‘can I have a private word, I am sure there is something we can do.’

Pavao nodded for me to stay where I was and to keep close to the principle who was getting extremely panicky. At the end of a Kalashnikov he wasn't such an arrogant, loud-mouthed pop star after all and had suddenly become very quiet. I watched as Pavao and the officer stroll off a few metres out of ear-shot.

Finally, after a few minutes gesticulating, shrugging and what looked to me like some form of bartering; Pavao and the officer returned smiling for the first time that evening. They shook hands and the official told his men to lower their weapons.

'We need to pay an on-the-spot fine.' Pavao said to the tour manger.

'Tell him to fuck off,' the principle butted in, but not loud enough for anyone to hear.

'We can either pay the fine or stay here until this mess gets sorted. He assured me it would probably take a few days, as everything and everyone will need to be thoroughly searched, passports checked, visas verified. And even if it didn't, I would strongly suggest we pay the fine and be on our way.'

'How much do they want?' he asked.

'He wanted twenty thousand US dollars.'

'Tell him to fuck off,' the principle said again a little louder. I cringed hoping that none of the Militia had heard.

'I told him that was ridiculous. I told him to call his immediate superior and to call the airport manager and that we would call the Embassy. He eventually settled on 1,000 dollars. I suggest we just pay and get the fuck out of here.'

Many of the ex-Soviet states were the same as Russia; everyone lives for the day and for what they can get with little regard for anyone else, the future or the consequences. The official wanted money - he didn't care that he ruined an otherwise great concert, he didn't care that he spoilt our visit to their country and he certainly didn't care that the principle would never want to return to the Ukraine again, therefore affecting hundreds of thousands of fans. He only cared about how much money he could make for himself. On operation we can prepare and plan for most things but there is always something that is virtually impossible to anticipate.

I was happy when the plane took-off, even happier when it landed back in Stockholm and completely ecstatic when the principle finally walked through the front door of his home. It was doubtful that I would ever see him again, not that I wanted to. It was a sector of the industry I had little interest in.

A few years later as I inadvertently watched a major football tournament on TV, I noticed the extremely familiar face of Pavao standing behind the same principle as he sang at the opening ceremony. I was glad that most of my clients were a lot more sober and level headed. Those few hours in the Ukraine were enough to last me a lifetime.

France On The Doors

France and Paris has always been one big adventure playground for me. There is so much to see and do, and so many places to explore and some of the funniest experiences have happened to me in France.

I first went as a spotty teenager working during the summer holidays for a travel company as a camp-site courier - although the work was more ‘cleaner’ than ‘courier’. It was a great way for a carefree student to spend six months of the summer and I think I fell in love with the country shortly thereafter. During my late teens and before I started working the doors, I went back to France with the same holiday company for a couple of summers; cleaning tents and looking after the English holiday makers, and one year I even landed myself the ultimate job of ‘leisure courier’ which involved me arranging a full range of social and sports activities. At that time it was probably the best job in the world as just had to arrange events for customers which included windsurfing and sailing, horse-riding, boat trips, barbeques, cheese and wine evenings, parties, quiz evenings and early morning jogs along the coast, which I never once managed to attend. However the holiday company was English and the customers were English so I never had an opportunity to learn the language. It wasn’t until a few years later, in 1989 and shortly after I had just trained as a bodyguard, that I was offered one of my very first security jobs for a wonderful French aristocratic lady living in the Loire Valley. It was after an extremely embarrassing incident with her and the language, that I decided to try and learn French... properly.

The contract was only for one week while her normal driver went on holiday. I got the job through a friend of a friend, and I was to simply drive my client wherever she needed to go, and to provide a basic level of security and safety. There was no threat; my role was just to add an extra level of reassurance and comfort to her environment.

Although quite elderly, she was extremely active and most mornings she would spend out and about, meeting her friends and dealing with the business of her estate. She lived in a small yet beautiful château near to the historical city of Blois. She still owned quite a bit of farming land adjacent to her estate which her late husband had successfully managed.

He had died a number of years previously and my client, along with her estate managers, continued to take care of the assets and the estate.

If there was ever such a thing as a down to earth and ‘normal’ aristocrat, then I believe she was it. I was briefly introduced to her a day before the contract was due to start, when I was flown to Paris by the security company who were tasked with the short contract. I wasn’t really sure how it was that they selected me, but I didn’t argue; I was a novice in the industry and immensely grateful for the contract and the experience. Before driving down to meet their client, I was given a meticulous and extremely thorough briefing by the company at their head office in central Paris. They talked about etiquette and expectations and a little about the French aristocratic system. I had very strict protocol which must be adhered to, without exception.

I was instructed that at precisely 8.45 each and every morning, I had to bring the car to the front of the house. I was told that the car should be cleaned and checked everyday beforehand, and the engine thoroughly warmed up. I was to stand by the side of the door and wait for Her Ladyship to leave the house, which she would do every morning at exactly 9 sharp. It was spring and the weather was already fairly warm and sunny so, if appropriate and depending upon the temperature, the car door could either be left open or closed, up to me to decide. Because I did not know the area, and so I could properly plan each and every journey, I was told that I would be given her schedule and destination details in advance the previous evening which allowed me time to work everything out. She knew I was English and that I only spoke very little French and so she kindly confirmed that she would be happy to assist on the routes and locations for any extra journeys that were not planned.

After quite a long drive from Paris to Blois I was introduced to Her Ladyship. The meeting lasted about three minutes. She was extremely hospitable and polite and reminded me of my grandmother; warm, kind-hearted and friendly but for whom everything must be just right.

Although really nervous, I was determined to do an excellent job. The whole business of protection is primarily based on word-of-mouth and good recommendations and, even though my contract was just for one week, a good reference from a French aristocrat was worth a great deal in those early stages of my bodyguarding career.

Although I was instructed not to engage in any superfluous conversation - standard client protocol - I was told that the principle was nevertheless extremely approachable. Apparently she did speak a little

English but as we were in France and she was French I was determined to learn a little of the language while I was there.

The first day went really well. At the foot of the steps I welcomed the principle with a polite, ‘Bon jour,’ and ushered her graciously into the back of the meticulously cleaned and thoroughly warmed up executive class Mercedes. I had been given her schedule the previous evening and had thoroughly planned primary and secondary routes to both destinations. Everything went incredibly smoothly, the roads were clear, the driving conditions excellent and we arrived at both destinations within just a few minutes either side of the ETA (estimated time of arrival). That first day we were back at the residence at a few minutes after 2pm and, after issuing me with the following day’s instructions and itinerary, I was advised that she would not be requiring my services any more that day as she wanted a quiet afternoon at home. I wished her a ‘bon après-midi’ (a nice afternoon), parked, cleaned and checked the vehicle once more. I then returned on foot to the servant’s quarters situated in a quiet corner of the estate. After preparing a light snack from the various provisions left for me by the other driver, I had a lazy evening on the sofa watching French television and attempting to learn a little more French. That first day I had managed a few polite niceties but, despite advice to the contrary, I was determined to demonstrate to Her Ladyship that I was learning more and more words and phrases each and every day.

Day two was the same as day one; everything was meticulously planned and smoothly executed and I was back on the estate by 4.15pm and in front of my French phrase books by six.

On the third day I awoke bright and early. While I going over the vehicle checking its lights, oil, brakes, I rehearsed out loud a few new words and a new phrase. Although I was instructed not to attempt any casual conversation, she was kind and very respectful and occasionally asked me an odd question or two. I wanted to be able to reply in her language and had given myself an achievable target of memorizing five new words and one new phase each and every day of my contract.

At 8.40 in the morning I wiped the last few fine fingerprints from the door handles, got into the car and drove out of the garage, around the corner and the few yards down the short gravel drive to the front of the residence. It was a fairly warm morning, but I left the engine running and the heaters on, opened the passenger door and waited for Her Ladyship.

As usual at precisely 9am, the front door rattled slightly and Her Ladyship emerged.

‘Bon jour Madam,’ I greeted her, smiling broadly and bowing my head slightly.

‘Bon jour,’ she replied gracefully.

‘Je suis chaud ce matin,’ I said.

She stopped suddenly in her tracks and slowly turned to me.

‘Excusez-moi?’ She replied, looking very stunned. I thought she was impressed that I had managed to learn a little more French than the previous morning, and so I proudly repeated the phrase: ’Je suis chaud ce matin,’ thinking it meant that it was hot today.

She coughed a little and I immediately sensed that things were not going exactly as I had planned. I wondered if I had fucked up, and that perhaps I should not have actually said anything more than a polite good morning.

‘Vous êtes?’ (you are?). She asked flabbergasted, and then smiled.

‘Oui, je suis,’ (yes, I am). I stuttered nervously. This was not the response I was expecting and I was suddenly feeling extremely embarrassed.

We got into the car and I tried to concentrate on the road, the route and the destinations, wondering whether I had overstepped the mark and whether she would report my misconduct back to the office. As I drove in deadly embarrassed silence I imagined myself dismissed after just the third day.

We arrived at the first destination, another grandiose country estate about twenty minutes from Her Ladyship’s residence. I drove slowly down a long driveway and stopped the car outside a pillared entrance. As I got out and opened the door, two elderly women emerged from the residence and greeted Her Ladyship with genteel hugs and polite kisses. I stood silently by the driver’s door as they busily chatted to each other in incomprehensible French. They turned away from the car, climbed the stairs and disappeared into the building. I got back into the vehicle and, just as I started the engine intending to move the vehicle off the driveway and over to one side, a woman emerged from the residence and rushed down the stairs waving at me. I immediately jumped out, thinking something had happened; maybe she had fallen or suddenly been taken ill. The woman appeared to be about thirty years old and dressed in what seemed to be a traditional maid’s uniform, which made her look a little more sexy and attractive than she perhaps was.

‘Hello.’ I said a little confused - not really knowing what to say or do.

‘Hello,’ she said politely, in English. ‘You are English, yes?’

‘Yes I am.’ I replied, wondering where this was leading. It obviously wasn’t as important as I had initially thought as once I had emerged from the car her manner became relaxed and calm. ‘You speak English?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘I studied English at university and lived in London for almost two years.’

‘And you are working here?’ I asked. I didn’t know what to say as I didn’t know the reason for her standing talking to me, particularly when it looked as though she was at work. Looking at her it seemed very strange for a young educated woman to be working as a maid.

‘Yes, I have been here for almost five years, my mother worked here, and before her my grandmother - kind of a family tradition.’ She smiled. She spoke English very well and had a lovely accent.

‘You don’t speak much French, do you?’ she asked.

‘No, but I am trying to learn.’

‘How do you get a job in France without any French?’ she asked sarcastically.

I thought about telling her to mind her own fucking business but decided to reply politely, ‘I think I was lucky, it is only for one week, while the other driver has a holiday.’

‘Yes, I know him.’ She said knowingly, nodding her head. ‘You know, you make very bad mistake in French?’

My heart jumped out of my mouth. ‘What was that?’ I gingerly asked. Since being in France I had only spoken a few words of French and that was to Her Ladyship.

‘You know, in French, to say it is a warm day we never say ‘Je suis chaud,’ It is very impolite,’ she stressed the very. ‘We say, Il fait chaud.’

‘Oh my goodness,’ I said, not knowing what else to say. I immediately felt horrified at the thought of having said something very impolite to her Ladyship.

I knew the verb ‘to be’ and that ‘Je suis’ meant ‘I am’. I also knew that ‘chaud’ means ‘warm’ or ‘hot’ and ‘ce matin’ means ‘this morning.’ Therefore I obviously thought that putting them all together they meant, ‘I am warm this morning’.

‘Does ‘Je suis chaud’ mean anything then?’ I whispered, confused.

‘Well, err....’ She hesitated and then slowly, ‘chaud means another kind of hot’

Oh my fucking God. I had told Her Ladyship that I was feeling randy today.

Fuck.

Not only had I told Her Ladyship that I was feeling randy; she had obviously asked this woman to have a tactful word with me explaining the subtleties of the French language.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

The only words of French I spoke to her Ladyship throughout the rest of that week were ‘Good morning’.

Thankfully I wasn’t dismissed and ended up receiving a glowing reference.

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In 1991 I was asked to go to Paris as Head of Security and General Manager of Le Central night-club on the Champs Élysée - one of the most famous Boulevards in the world. I had been asked to take over the club for European Leisure, a British based company. They had just purchased Le Central, along with three other units in central Paris, and were having huge problems with theft, corruption, the French management and security. The place was being ripped off big time and because I could speak a little French (I had decided to learn after that hugely embarrassing incident with Her Ladyship), and had been in the security industry for a number of years, both as a doorman sorting out some of the roughest venues around the UK, and as a night-club manager and bodyguard, I was asked to go over and see what I could do.

I had been to Paris a couple of times previously and I loved everything about the city; I adored the architecture, the night-life, the women, the French ‘way of life,' and Paris was a wonderful, vibrant and extremely exciting city. I was twenty-nine years old and had finally landed a good job with a nice apartment. After many years of roller-coaster ups and downs, I felt more comfortable living and working in Paris than almost anywhere else. I was finally getting myself together and sorting out my life.

Initially my job at Le Central nightclub was extremely difficult, made even harder by the fact that my British boss, who was temporarily based in Paris, was a real arsehole. Le Central was experiencing enormous losses due to a huge amount of pilfering, piss-poor management and a total lack of any form of marketing or promotions. The French did not like working for the English and once they realised that the club had been sold to an English company they more or less ran riot. Before I arrived, my immediate boss had sacked the French manager and was attempting to run things by himself but had made things even worse by his arrogance, disrespect and total lack of any French. He

shouted and screamed at the staff in English which, understandably, they deeply resented.

On my very first day at work I arranged a meeting with all the employees and told everyone that, because of all the problems the club had been experiencing, I was actually going to close the nightclub down. They all knew that French Labour Laws made sacking employees extremely difficult, but closing down the club was a different story completely. Of course I wasn't intending to close, but I hoped that if the staff really believed they would all be out of a job they would change their ways and their attitude.

And surprisingly they did.

When I first started work they initially assumed I would be exactly the same as my boss but after a few days most of the staff genuinely realised that I was different and understood that I was on their side. The suspicion and doubt about me slowly faded and everyone started to work together as a team again, for the benefit of both the club and the security of their jobs. There were not many clubs in Paris like Le Central and everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy working there and no-one really wanted to lose their jobs.

I employed a great bar manager who was honest, efficient, hard-working and looked after the bar extremely well. I had also got onto the good side of the arrogant and occasionally egotistical French head doorman who, with steady persuasion and gentle coercion, reluctantly tidied up his door policies and eventually ran a clean front-of-house operation. As the weeks passed I slowly got to know the staff and they slowly got to know me; the club gradually changed and we started making a profit. I had managed to sort out the corruption and reduced the massive levels of theft that the English owners had inherited when they initially bought the place. After a nightmarish few weeks, I had settled in and my life in Paris was very enjoyable.

The club opened at 10pm every evening and, after getting the club ready, checking the tills, the stock and the staff, I spent most evenings standing around on the front door. It was a great place to watch the world go by because most visitors to Paris would wander up and down the Champs Élysée and almost everyone eventually passed Le Central. My office was directly above the front entrance so if I got fed up with standing on the door I would go upstairs and sit in privacy at my desk with a large glass of Jack Daniels and quietly watch the world go by behind the large opaque glass window.

Along with the position of Manager came a great little apartment situated half way down a small side-street off Rue Faubourg Montmartre, and directly above one of the only lesbian nightclubs in Paris. I lived on the top floor, the club was in the basement and my door was directly next to the entrance to the nightclub. As I came and went I got to know the butch door staff and the very sexy manageress, stopping occasionally for a chat. After a few weeks I found out what a truly wonderful place it was to live when, early one morning after I had finished work, the manageress invited me in for a drink. I can honestly say that there is nothing more magnificent in the world than propping up the bar, with a Jack Daniels in my hand, watching two gorgeous French girls snog each other on the dance floor. I doubt there is anything more any man could ever want from life!

Not knowing much about being lesbian, I quickly found out that there were two sorts; 'butch' who tended to be more male in their characteristics and 'femme' who took the more feminine role. Of course not all of the club's lesbian customers were gorgeous and two butches snogging wasn't particularly appealing, but two femmes together was a pure delight. I also found out that not all of them were totally lesbian, it seemed many were bi-sexual and a half drunk blond English nightclub manager propping up the bar at six in the morning was an alternative option if they failed with the same sex. And who was I to argue? But sadly, no matter how hard I tried, my dream of getting two lesbians from the club up to my apartment and into the same bed as me was never realised.

Being the General Manager at a well known Parisian nightclub was a distinct advantage when it came to meeting women, although surprisingly I didn't actually meet any French women. Either it was me and I was unable to connect with them, or French women just didn't like me. However, because it was a tourist spot and primarily a tourist nightclub I occasionally met women from other countries.

One evening, as I emerged from my office, I noticed two very beautiful women standing cheerfully chatting amongst themselves near the entrance to the club. It was about 3am; they were immaculately dressed in elegant flowing evening gowns decorated with very expensive-looking jewellery and it seemed to me that they were probably on their way home from a very classy event. They also seemed a little drunk and I could hear them discussing whether or not to come in.

I smiled and politely said, 'Bon soir' (Good evening). I was hoping to prevent them from going home and try to persuade them to join me for

a drink.

‘Salut,’ they replied in French but with an accent that was definitely not French.

They both looked very classy and I asked if they spoke any English as my French wasn’t that good (and I desperately wanted to talk to them).

‘Of course,’ the shorter of the two replied as though speaking English was the most natural thing in the world. I asked where they were from and they both replied almost in unison that they were from Switzerland. The taller of the two then told me in almost perfect English that they had just been to a cocktail party at a Swiss Diplomat’s residence which overlooked the Arc de Triomphe just off Avenue Hoche at the top of the Champs Élysée. They were thinking about where to go next. I was intrigued as to why two gorgeous single girls had been invited to a Diplomat’s cocktail evening and wanted to know more, so I invited them in. They didn’t hesitate and immediately said yes.

I ordered and signed for a round of drinks from the bar manager and contentedly leant against the bar grinning like a Cheshire cat. As well as being very beautiful they both seemed extremely well educated and from their demeanour had high-class backgrounds. The taller of the two was called Kate; she told me she was living at the Hilton hotel next to the Eiffel Tower. Apparently, her father was on the Hilton Board of Directors and was in charge of Hilton Europe. The other girl was called Julianne; her father was a leading corporate accountant in Zurich. She was visiting Kate for a few days, as Kate’s parents were away on business in Europe. Julianne also had a room at the hotel.

Kate was beautiful; elegant, very slim and well over six feet tall. She towered over me. Julianne was a lot shorter and, with her long blond hair, immaculate clear complexion and soft blue eyes, more delicate looking. Because of her height and appearance Kate was undeniably striking but I preferred Julianne.

We stood against the bar chatting and flirting and getting more and more drunk. I thought my boat had definitely come in, especially when they invited me back to their place for more drinks. At first I didn’t believe them; I thought the story that they were staying at the Hilton and that Kate’s father was one of the directors was a little bit of bullshit. We all occasionally talk bullshit, especially when we are either drunk or want to impress, but as the taxi pulled into the hotel’s courtyard and we were politely greeted by the sleepy reception staff, I realised that they were not lying after all.

Kate's suite was at the end of the corridor on the top floor of the building. It was dawn and I stood by the large glass windows, mesmerised as I watched the sun, silhouetting the Eiffel Tower, rise over Paris; its rays streaming majestically into the exquisitely decorated suite.

Kate telephoned reception and ordered a bottle of champagne, which miraculously arrived only seconds after she hung up. Along with the champagne came a plate of precisely cut melon and strawberries. The three of us lounged drunkenly together on a huge beige sofa, champagne and strawberries in hand and staring out at the marvellous view. I felt a like king sitting between two very drunk yet incredibly gorgeous women. I was in heaven, things couldn't get any better. Or, as both girls rested their heads gently on my shoulders and folded their arms across my waist, maybe they could!

Suddenly Kate, struggling to keep her drunken eyes open, slurred 'I need to sleep.' I smiled to myself - this was it! I was going to get invited into the same bed as these two women and we were going to have an amazing threesome. The only problem was that I seriously doubted I could walk in a straight line and string two coherent sentences together let alone do anything else.

Kate rose from the sofa and, without saying another word, stumbled into her bedroom slamming the door shut behind her. My heart sank as my lifelong ambition of a threesome quickly disappeared behind a firmly closed door. I looked at Julianne and grinned stupidly. She shrugged silently in reply, clumsily climbed off the sofa knocking over Kate's half-full glass of champagne and stood over me holding out her right hand. I grabbed it, eased myself up off the couch and followed her as she led me out of Kate's suite towards her room next door.

Although not as elegant as Kate, Julianne was nevertheless very beautiful. I watched her little bottom wiggle in her slinky cocktail dress as she walked slightly ahead of me, I have always had a thing for little bottoms and I grinned at the drunken, depraved thought of it sitting on my face.

I was smashed; the corridor seemed to move from side to side and I had to concentrate really hard on walking in a straight line. When we got to her room I leaned precariously against the wall as Julianne let go of my hand and swiped the card. She pushed open the door, took my hand again and guided me into her room.

Once inside I fell forward drunkenly onto the bed. I rolled over on my back and looked up at the ceiling; spinning uncontrollably above me. 'Why the fuck did I drink so much?' I thought to myself as I glanced

over at Julianne who was standing at the end of the bed, swaying a little, staring down at me. Fuck, I wish I was sober. I watched as her right hand seductively, slowly unbuttoned the front of her dress. I gawped as it gradually slid gracefully off her shoulders and onto the floor. What a body. It was gorgeous. I starred up at her, open mouthed, as she stood in front of me in just a tiny black thong.

But something wasn't quite right.

She looked down at me and smiled sweetly. 'God I love you,' I drunkenly thought to myself as I watched her right hand reach across her beautifully shaped, perfectly formed tummy. She seemed to be tugging at her left arm. Just as her left arm seemed to come off in her hand I fell into a deep drunken sleep.

I wasn't sure what time it was but I had the mother of all headaches. I tried opening my eyes but the sunlight streaming through the window made me squint and cower back under the sheets. For a while I lay curled up trying to ignore my pounding head and dry mouth and remember the night before. I could just about recall being led to the room and falling on the bed, but almost everything else was a complete blur - apart from a George E Romero zombie-like scene from a horror film which I tried to shake from my mind. I must have had a horrible, horrible nightmare.

As I laid still and silent I realised I was completely naked. I held my breath and listened to see if anyone was next to me. I couldn't hear a thing apart from the sound of a vacuum cleaner noisily making its way along the corridor outside. Nothing moved, there was no other sound and I sensed I was alone. After laying quietly for a few more minutes, I decided I should try to get up and have a shower, get dressed and then try to find out what exactly did happen. I slowly straightened myself out from my foetal position and rolled over onto my back. I felt something touch my cheek. Fuck, there was someone next to me after all. Whoever it was must still be fast asleep. I nervously turned around and came face to face with an arm lying on the pillow.

I screamed and fell backwards off the side of the bed.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck,' I shrieked as I scrabbled away from the solitary arm.

'Oh my God,' I said cowering in the corner. 'What the fuck have I done?'

After a few seconds I managed to compose myself enough to look over the side of the bed to see if there was a bloody mutilated body lying nearby. There was nothing. I carefully looked under the bed, again nothing. I peered over to the bathroom door, which was slightly ajar, and

imagined a dead, disfigured body in pieces in the bath. I buried my face in my hands as I tried to figure it all out. What had happened? It was like the movies - guy wakes up in hotel room with beautiful dead girl in pieces next to him. Could I really have chopped a gorgeous girl up into small pieces and left her body parts carelessly strewn around the room as I fell into a drunken sleep? Possible, but unlikely.

Through my fingers I starred at the solitary arm lying motionless on my nice white fluffy pillow and noticed no blood or protruding bones, no sinew or hanging tendons. It slowly dawned on me - it was artificial.

I warily and nervously edged myself closer, half expecting the arm to jump up at me and grab me by the neck. It didn't. I carefully reached across the bed, gingerly picked it up and gazed at it, captivated. It was a prosthetic arm. All of a sudden the telephone rang, jolting me out of my trance.

'Hello.' I said cautiously.

'Morning,' a nervous quiet voice replied.

'Who is that?' I asked.

'Me.'

'Who?'

'Julianne,' she replied meekly. 'Remember?'

'Oh, err, of course.' I said, looking down at the prosthetic arm. 'Err, are you OK?' I asked.

'Yes, I have a bad head.'

'Me too.' I wasn't sure what to say next so I foolishly asked: 'Err, are you, err, missing anything?'

I ludicrously pictured her looking around her room confused, puzzled, wondering if something was missing and then suddenly, looking down at the space where her arm should be, thinking, 'Oops, seemed to have lost something.'

For a few seconds there was silence and then she whispered, 'I will be there in a minute,' and immediately hung up.

I put on the hotel's dressing gown and sat on the edge of the bed, looking down at Julianne's plastic arm in my lap, trying to remember what had happened the previous evening. Sadly, I couldn't remember a thing apart from meeting the girls in the club and the three of us drinking champagne together on Kate's sofa.

After a few minutes there was a timid knock. I got up, walked over to the door and opened it slightly. I smiled at the very embarrassed looking Julianne and handed back her arm. Without smiling or saying a

word she grabbed it, turned quickly and went back into Kate's suite opposite.

I showered and quickly dressed and, before leaving, wrote a note to Julianne asking that if she was free and wanted to meet again for coffee to call me or pop by the club. But I never heard from her, or Kate again.

Bikers In Paris

Because Le Central was on the Champs Élysée it attracted an eclectic mixture of customers, from tiny Japanese tourists with rattling cameras and floppy hats, to bearded, tattooed bikers in leathers and chains. We had no dress code and no specific client profile; anyone that wanted to come in, could.

Originally from California, Jay spoke with a hoarse, grating American drawl that was instantly recognisable. He had long black hair tied back into a pony-tail, a thick moustache, a goatee beard and heavily tattooed arms. Weighty skull and cross-bone rings adorned almost every finger and his thick leather jacket seemed permanently attached to his torso. Jay was a real character and, despite his deceptive and unfriendly appearance, he was a really nice guy who I immediately got on well with. Most Friday and Saturday nights Jay would park his Harley Low Rider outside the entrance to the club and pop in for a few drinks. Sometimes he stayed all night and other times he would just pop in briefly on his way to some party. Most of our conversation was about bikes - specifically Harleys - and girls.

One Friday night, shortly after the club had opened, Jay parked his bike as usual outside the front door and popped up to my office which was directly above the front entrance. As he stomped up the stairs I knew it was him as I had heard the thump, thump, thump of the beautiful sounding 1340cc engine. Apparently Harley-Davidson once tried to patent the sound of its engines. My dream is to someday own a Harley as I have always adored the look, the feel and the exhilarating sound the bike makes.

'Hey, wanna come out for a drink?' Jay asked in his distinctive gravel drawl.

'Where?' I asked.

'Got a friend over. Want you to meet him. Just for an hour or two,' he replied.

The club had just opened and I knew it would be at least a couple of hours before it would get busy. We always opened at 10pm but nobody ever came in much before midnight. The busiest time was from between

2.30 and 5am, and we generally closed at around six in the morning. I would then take the metro home - just as everyone was going to work.

'Why not?' I said rising from behind my desk and grabbing the spare crash-helmet I kept on a shelf nearby.

As I left I handed the club's keys to my assistant manager who was more than capable of running the club in my absence.

I must have looked very strange in my suit and tie behind a leather-clad long haired tattooed biker on his Harley. We drove on the pavement the few hundred yards to the top of the Champs Élysée, then joined the route around the Arc de Triomphe and back down the other side of the Champs. We crossed the busy Place de Concorde and parked directly outside the Hotel Crillion, one of the most exclusive and expensive hotels in Paris.

'You're kidding, right?' I asked jumping off the back.

'Nope,' Jay replied turning off the engine.

With Jay striding confidently in front, I followed meekly behind wondering what an earth we were doing. We walked straight passed the horrified doorman who wasn't sure whether to stop us or call for the police, and crossed the plush columned foyer into a swish looking cocktail bar. Standing at the bar with his back towards us I noticed another biker dressed in black leathers. Hanging on each arm, giggling and flirting mischievously, were a couple of gorgeous looking women dressed in expensive looking slinky cocktail dresses. As we approached one of the girls turned to us, smiled, waved and called out: 'Hi Jay.' She looked incredible; as though she had just stepped out from a Hollywood movie set and I wondered what an earth she was doing hanging on the arm of a scruffy looking biker. As she smiled and waved the biker turned and greeted Jay with a, 'Hi bro' and a hug. Being the manager of a popular nightclub in the centre of Paris I had met many people and somehow felt as though I recognised him - but I couldn't think where. Jay introduced me: 'Rob, this is Mickey,' as I nodded and shook his hand I realised it was the famous Hollywood actor Mickey Rourke.

'Hey man, have a drink,' he nodded to the hovering bartender and circled the drinks with his forefinger indicating another round. I wasn't asked what I wanted but a few seconds later a bottle of Jack Daniels, a bucket full of ice and five fresh whiskey glasses, placed under delicate, frilly coasters, appeared on the bar (it seemed the girls were going to drink whiskey as well). Flicking the stupid looking coasters off the bar in the direction of the bartender, who bent down and picked them up from the floor, Mickey filled his glass almost to the brim and toasted Harley

Davidson - the best fucking bikes in the world. Jay agreed, the girls giggled and I stood silently not really knowing what to say.

After a couple of full glasses my head was spinning, my tie was off and my jacket thrown messily in a corner. I have never been that much of a big drinker and I certainly wasn't used to too much Jack Daniels.

'It's fucking empty!' Mickey called to the barman and, as if by magic, another bottled instantly appeared. I could tell this was going to be one hell of a night. At the rate Mickey and Jay were downing Jack Daniels I knew I would never be able to keep up, but I was having a good time nevertheless; it wasn't often you could sit with a top Hollywood star drinking Jack Daniels in a bar of one of the most expensive hotels in Paris. It seemed Mickey wasn't anything like the roles he had played in some of his movies, he talked about boxing and bikes, drinking and fights and seemed as though he didn't want anything to do with the movie industry. 'Hollywood was bollocks' was all he said about that side of his life the entire evening.

'Hey man, you coming with us?' Jay asked me.

'Where're you going?' I replied, believing we were spending the evening propping up the hotel's bar.

'Over to Sammy's.'

'Sure,' I replied as if I knew exactly who Sammy was.

Although my assistant was running Le Central, I hadn't actually told him how long I would be. I knew I had a club to manage and that I should really return, but I was enjoying myself too much and anyway, I would probably never have the chance to drink socially with a top celebrity again. 'Fuck the club' I thought, 'tonight it can run itself.'

Jay's big Harley was parked out the front but I knew it certainly was not big enough for all five of us. 'How are we all getting there?' I asked.

Mickey, who by that time seemed fairly drunk, waved a set of keys in front of my nose. 'We are going to fucking fly,' he slurred as he finished off the half glass of whisky and slammed the glass onto the bar. He turned to his gorgeous companions, kissed them both on the cheek and said 'sorry girls, this isn't really for you.' He then kissed them hard on the lips, got up from the bar and said, 'see you around.'

What a lucky bastard, I thought.

'Meet you out front,' he said to Jay and me.

As the three of us left I turned to see two very sullen looking girls sitting at the bar staring sadly at us. Sammy's had better be worth it, I thought.

Staggering towards the lift leading to the private parking area and still holding the keys in the air, Mickey said, half to himself and half to us, ‘See you out front.’

As we left the lobby of the hotel the doorman politely said to us in English ‘Good night gentlemen,’ while probably thinking to himself what low-life trash.

I climbed onto the back of the bike. Jay revved and revved the engine loudly, enjoying the fact that he was almost certainly waking up all the Crillion’s wealthy, pretentious guests. A few minutes later Mickey emerged from around the corner on another fat loud Harley and, without stopping, blasted his horn as he sped past us. Jay slammed the Harley into first and followed. I held onto the rails for dear life as we sped off through the streets of Paris and, as the wind battered me, I realised I had left my jacket and tie back at the hotel.

We hastily left the city centre and made our way into the suburbs and then into what looked like a run-down industrial park. At the far end of a row of empty ramshackle looking warehouse units I could see neon and movement. As we slowed slightly, three bikers screaming at the tops of their voices, whizzed passed us heading in the same direction. As we got nearer the lights grew brighter and the music louder. We pulled up outside Sammy’s, a scruffy looking biker’s bar, and parked alongside a neat row of other Harleys. Rock music blared above the sound of the engines and I wondered what the fuck was I doing?

The bar was packed. It reminded me of the movies, except everyone was speaking French and this was for real. At one end a band was playing an old Lynard Skynard number and the room was heaving with smoke and leather and tattoos and long greasy hair. As if reading my mind, Jay put his arm around my shoulders and grinned a stupid drunken grin. ‘Hey man, everyone’s cool, you’ll be fine.’ He said. I didn’t feel fine. Amongst the leathers and denim, the jeans, boots, studs and skulls I looked a real twat wearing a plain white shirt, black trousers and black dress shoes.

Even worse - I was English!

As we entered I felt all eyes turn to us, or rather me. I could see bikers look and smile and laugh and obviously wonder what the fuck a geek like me was doing in a place like that. I wasn’t easily intimidated but I felt a little overwhelmed and prayed we wouldn’t be staying long and that nothing bad would happen. I really didn’t fancy battling against scores of crazed froggy bikers baying for the blood of a geeky-looking Englishman.

‘Hey,’ Mickey shouted in English to the pony-tailed tattooed barman above the din of the club. ‘Bottle of JD.’

‘Quoi?’ Shouted the barman.

‘Bottle of fucking Jack Daniels.’ Mickey shouted again, leaning over the bar pointing to the JD on the shelf behind.

‘Je ne comprends pas,’ the barman shrugged and walked off to serve a menacing, heavily bearded biker further down the bar. I was sure that the bartender understood but in France you must at least try to speak French as the French respond really badly to any other language, especially English and especially when it is being yelled at them.

‘What the fuck is this?’ Mickey said exasperated, holding up his arms in despair.

‘Hey man, keep cool. I‘ll get it,’ Jay said and asked a second bartender a little further down the bar for a bottle of Jack Daniels in French. I looked along the bar and noticed the first bartender leaning over and whispering something into the biker’s ear. He looked over at us and nodded. We had only been there a few minutes and I had a real uneasy feeling that things were going to turn nasty.

A bottle of Jack Daniels was placed on the bar and three glasses were placed in a row by its side.

‘Cinq cents francs,’ the bartender said. Mickey took out a wad of French Francs and casually flicked five hundred onto the bar. The bartender silently gathered the notes, turned around and placed them into a drawer.

‘Au Français, fous le camp!’ (To the French, fuck off!) Mickey said. I looked at him shocked. He could speak a bit of French after all.

Just at that moment the menacing, ugly looking, bearded biker from further down the bar suddenly appeared behind us and behind him stood three other equally menacing and just as ugly leather clad colleagues.

‘Fous le camp!’ Mickey turned to them and said again, raising his glass.

I looked up at the biker and gulped. He was a bear of a man, about six foot four, probably three hundred pounds with a ragged beard, long black hair and really, really ugly. I always thought the French were generally an attractive race, but him and his pals must have been last in the ‘looks’ queue - there was definitely nothing left to hand out when it was their turn. Just like in the movies, some of the other bikers around us moved back, sensing something was going on and not really wanting anything to do with it. But this wasn’t the movies, it was real and we were going to get slaughtered. Jay and I were getting nervous but Mickey

didn't seem to give a fuck. I knew from numerous newspapers and magazines that he fancied himself as a boxer and street fighter and it really seemed to me that, there and then, he wanted to have a go with the entire group of mean looking ugly French bikers that had suddenly surrounded us. He nodded to them as though affirming that he was ready, smiled to himself, finished off his whisky and again slammed the glass hard down onto the counter.

While the three other bikers stared threateningly at Jay and me, 'the bear' slowly wrapped an old bike chain around his huge tattooed fists and stared with his dead-pan hate filled eyes directly at Mickey. They wanted blood and had obviously selected their targets. 'Fuck,' I thought as I looked around. Even if Mickey was the hard man he thought he was, against this lot I knew we wouldn't have a chance, we were dead meat. I thought about trying to talk our way out of it, buying them a few drinks, backing down and apologising, but glancing over at Mickey I could see he was having none of it - he was drunk and foolish and wanted a fight. I could see a 'I don't give a fuck' smirk on his face. Maybe he didn't give a fuck but I did, and I really didn't fancy battling my way out of this biker's den. It looked a mad-house and I didn't want any part of it.

But I was part of it.

I had two choices; I could walk off and leave Jay and Mickey to their fate or take some action. I knew I couldn't walk off. I could never walk off, no matter how much the odds were stacked against me. I would prefer to die fighting than escape as a coward. As Mickey slowly turned to face his towering opponent I realised I had to strike first, and as hard as possible. Otherwise, no doubt about it, we were going to get a severe beating and would be limping and stuttering for years. I took a step backwards, turned slightly to the side and landed the hardest angled snap kick I could possibly carry out directly into the side of Bear's knee. Above the din of the bar I could hear a dull crack as the biker's joint folded sideways. He screamed and crashed to the floor clutching his knee. The tendons had been violently torn from the bone; he definitely wouldn't be getting up in a hurry and he probably wouldn't be walking normally for many months.

My arms instinctively raised in a defensive posture as I fully expected to be leapt on and torn to pieces by each and every one of the crazy looking froggy bikers. I was shitting myself as I waited to get pulverised into nothingness. But they just gazed silently down at Bear curled up on the floor clutching his knee groaning. Suddenly, surreally, they patted me on the back. 'Très bon,' (very good) 'incroyable,'

(amazing) ’excellent!’ they cried. I couldn’t believe it. A couple of bikers helped Bear from the floor and carried him hobbling towards the exit. We stood there completely stunned, ready for a really good hiding, and for a moment or two we were fearfully wondering whether this was some kind of a trick and that any minute we would get a bottle over the back of our heads or rammed into our face.

‘Une autre bouteille de Jack Daniels,’ one of the bikers barked over to the barman. The grumpy bartender, who had at first refused to serve us, placed a fresh full bottle next to the half-full bottle we had been drinking from just a few minutes earlier.

‘Santé,’ (good health) he bellowed and smiled.

For the following couple of hours Mickey, Jay and I got exceedingly drunk with the best - the only - group of French bikers I have ever met. They took the piss out of my clothes and I tactfully decided against taking the piss out of their smelly unwashed leathers.

At about 5.30 in the morning, leaving Mickey with the Bikers, Jay - who could hardly walk let alone ride a motorbike - gave me a lift on a very unstable Harley back to the nightclub. But I was far too pissed to notice. I stumbled into the club just as it was closing and spent the rest of that evening and most of the following day sprawled over the desk in my office fast asleep.

A couple of days later Jay popped by the club again. It was mid afternoon and I was at the office doing some paperwork. I enjoyed going to the club in the afternoon as, after I had completed my work and got everything ready for that evening’s business, I would either sit with a coffee somewhere on the Champs Élysée and watch the good-looking and elegant French parade by, or make my way to the Seine where I had found a great little café-boat that sat moored on the embankment overlooking the spectacular Notre Dame Cathedral. It was a calm and beautiful spot and I could quietly sit there for hours sipping cappuccino and reading a book.

Jay said that Mickey was in Paris for a few more days and that evening they were going to an underground bare-knuckle fight the gypsies were holding at a secret venue on the outskirts of the city. Following my startling performance a few nights previously, Mickey asked if I wanted to come along. I thought it was a great idea. Mickey was certainly a real character and a great laugh and had a personality and approach to life I really liked. He didn’t give a fuck what people thought of him. Actually he didn’t give a fuck about much in general, all he wanted was a good time, an extreme time and fuck the consequences.

Even though I certainly wanted to spend another drunken evening with him before he went back to LA, I was a bit suspicious. Perhaps he had plans to fight or worse, have me fight! Jay laughed and said what a fucking idiot I was and that we would definitely be only spectators. Some friends of friends of friends had got passes, which apparently wasn't easy as these bare-knuckle underground fights were illegal and the gypsy community was suspicious of everyone outside their unique closed circle. After I was re-assured for a second and third time that I would definitely not be fighting - I knew my limits and gypsy bare-knuckle fights were definitely, one hundred percent way, way, above my limit - I agreed to go.

Early that evening, Jay came back into Paris and picked me up from outside my apartment. Jay lived on the outskirts of Paris on a tiny houseboat, moored at the bottom of a friend's garden in the middle of no-where. I had been there only once, a couple of months previously, when I was invited to meet Jay's girlfriend. I didn't have a car so on that occasion Jay met me at the nearest train station; we then drove about three kilometres into the countryside. At a pair of majestic iron gates which had been left open, we turned into a long gravel driveway leading to the front of the building. According to Jay, his friend was a top music producer and his house was, in fact, a mansion. Slowly and quietly (as quietly as was possible on a Harley) we drove around the house and down a small brick path towards the embankment at the end of the garden where Jay's small houseboat was moored.

From Jay's scruffy appearance and rebellious character I had expected his girlfriend to be just the same - another strong willed, not particularly attractive, slightly crazy biker's chic but as I got off the bike and took off my crash-helmet I looked up to see probably one of the most beautiful French girls I have ever seen in my life. She was so very different from her rough-neck scruffy boyfriend, in fact she was completely the opposite; she wore immaculate, beautifully tailored fashionable clothes, she had a gorgeous figure, her face was delicate, her skin clear and beautiful, her hair short and slightly spiky and she spoke English with that wonderful, sensual, sexy French accent. In a lifetime working in pubs and clubs and travelling the world I have met many extremely beautiful women and, although at times breathtaking, genuine beauty didn't really affect me and had found that, in most cases, beauty really was just skin deep. But when I met Jay's girlfriend I was mesmerised. Although I tried not to show it and acted as normally as I could, I just couldn't keep my eyes off her. She was stunning and for a

few brief seconds I felt envious. Given the fact that the houseboat only had a two-ringed stove the meal she cooked us that evening was wonderful and we drank expensive red wine and never once mentioned bikes or bikers, drink or women.

.As Jay impatiently honked on his horn outside my apartment; I rushed downstairs, slammed the door shut and jumped on the back of the bike. This time I had learnt my lesson and was wearing old, tatty jeans, black biking boots and an old brown leather jacket. Although slightly apprehensive as I had never been to such an event, I was really looking forward to it. It would be totally different to anything I had previously experienced and I might even pick-up a few bare-knuckle street-style fighting techniques.

Jay had arranged to meet Mickey at the venue and had been given precise directions that afternoon when he called the hotel to confirm the time and place. We made our way to the correct village, about an hours' ride north of Paris, but at the village we then found ourselves completely lost. According to the directions Jay had scribbled down and kept in his jacket pocket, we were supposed to leave the village along a certain route, which we did, and then take a left at a t-junction, which we did, and then an immediate right. But there was no immediate right. The road was straight with no turn-offs for about two kilometres. We drove up and down the road a couple of times but there was definitely no turning, not even a path. We even took the right turning two kilometres up the road but that just led to an old farm house whose dogs barked nervously at the sound of the bike.

It was getting dark. We were told that, as soon as the sun set, the tournament would begin and we knew that once it was dark we would have absolutely no chance of ever finding the venue. Jay was extremely pissed off and got angrier and angrier as he swung the heavy bike around the small lanes looking for the right turning. I was holding on for dear life. I was pissed off too, both with Jay for getting the directions wrong and at not being able to get to the event. It would have been a great evening and almost certainly a once-in-a-lifetime, unique experience. We eventually had no choice but to give up, turn around and make our way back to Paris. Jay dropped me off at my apartment and I nodded an unspoken, pissed-off farewell. For the first time since I moved to Paris I spent the rest of that evening alone in my apartment watching incomprehensibly boring French TV.

The next day Jay called. We were going to meet Mickey one final time before his flight back to the US. I told Jay I would meet him at the

hotel as I had to pop to Le Central first to check the previous evening's business. I caught the metro, spent an hour at the club and walked down the Champs Élysée to the hotel. I noticed Jay and Mickey's bikes parked outside, between two top of the range Mercedes. I nodded and smiled to the doormen and walked across the foyer straight to the bar. I could see the leather-clad backs of Jay and Mickey perched at their usual place at the bar, with their usual large glasses of Jack Daniels in their hands. I took the seat to the left of Jay who was seated to the left of Mickey.

'How are you doing?' I asked as I sat down. Jay turned and greeted me. I then looked over and nodded at Mickey and, as he gulped back a full glass of the gold coloured liquid, immediately noticed his battered and bruised face. He had two black eyes, a deep-looking cut over his left eyebrow and a red, swollen lip.

'Fuck.' I exclaimed.

I wanted to ask what had happened but I knew that it would be a pretty pointless question - it was obvious what had happened. As expected Mickey wasn't just a spectator at the previous evening's tournament after all and, from the look of his face, had evidently been given a severe beating. He smiled showing a fresh gap in his white Hollywood teeth.

'Hey man, you missed a great evening,' Mickey said, wincing a little in pain.

'Looks like it,' I said half-heartedly. I didn't know Mickey well, but in the brief few days I had spent with him I understood that he definitely walked the wild side of life. I should have known that the assurances he gave me of just being spectators at the gypsy gathering were completely unfounded. From my experiences and brief conversations with Mickey over those few days I understood that he could never resist the temptation of testing his fighting abilities. Looking at him sitting there bruised and bashed, I was somewhat thankful that we didn't find the venue after all. According to Mickey, the tournament went well and was 'so fucking cool.' At the end of the evening, because he had been recognised as a celebrity, Mickey was offered a courtesy round in the ring with the bloodied champion. He jumped at the chance and was cheered on by the baying crowd. Apparently he had landed a couple of good punches before, 'I was fucking taken out, man,' he said. As I sat listening to him recount the story, blow by blow, I wondered what Jay and I would have done had we been there. Being foreigners and friends of Mickey it would have been extremely difficult for us to have refused an offer of a round in the ring with the champion and therefore we too

would have been sitting at the bar, wincing in pain, bloodied and badly beaten.

That evening, a very drunk Mickey departed Paris first class on the red-eye back to New York and onward to California. His Harley was eventually picked up from outside the hotel by the hire company. A few weeks later I left Paris for the war-torn Balkans and never heard from him or Jay again, until about ten years later when I was in Moscow. I was with a British colleague; we had just finished a protection contract and decided to pop into Papa John's pizza place for something to eat. We had a nice pizza meal and a couple of bottles of wine in the restaurant and decided to go to Papa's nightclub downstairs in the basement for a couple of quick drinks before making our way back to the hotel. Papa's was the place to go if you wanted to meet a gorgeous, sweet sixteen err, eighteen year old Russian girl. Although definitely far too young for me (no, really!) it was an unbelievable place to letch at the young girls as they seductively paraded around the dance floor teasing anyone and everyone who showed them the slightest interest. Unsurprisingly the place was always crowded, very hot and very wild, and as foreigners we were immediately granted front-of-queue access and free admission. I suppose the owners knew that foreigners generally had a lot more money to spend than sixteen err eighteen year old Russian students. Papa's was an excellent way to end a successful security operation and as we stood at the bar waiting to be served I was absolutely sure the girls dancing on the bar in their miniskirts were not wearing knickers.

Crowds were gathered round a stage area at one end of the cramped club. Good-natured screams and shouts could be heard above the din of the music; something was going on and my colleague and I tried to ease ourselves past the fit young bodies to see what was happening. Suddenly, speaking Russian in a harsh American accent, I heard a loud and very familiar grating voice over the microphone. I knew that voice. And then I saw a tattooed arm and, between the crowds, the instantly recognisable head of a long-haired biker bob up and down. It was Jay! I couldn't believe my eyes. What the fuck was Jay doing in Moscow and why was he standing on a stage in Papa's nightclub? As it was so busy I couldn't get anywhere near him so the very next day I called the club.

'Fucking hell man,' he said when I eventually managed to get through. 'What the fuck are you doing in Moscow?' I asked.

The very next day I made my eager way to Papa John's and met Jay again after many long years. He hadn't changed one bit, his hair was the same length and still tied into a pony-tail, his goatee seemed exactly the

same, he still wore biker's leathers (probably the same ones) and apparently he still smoked huge amounts of cannabis.

He told me that shortly after I left for the Balkans he met a Russian girl on holiday in Paris. Three weeks later he packed his bags and left France for Moscow, and had been living there ever since. He was working as the entertainments manager there five to six nights a week. It seemed the tables had turned; this time I was meeting him at a night-club he was running. We reminisced about Paris, laughed at some of our escapades and spoke briefly about Mickey. According to Jay; Mickey had long since disappeared from the Hollywood scene into his own little world of alcohol and drugs. I wondered what had happened to Jay's stunningly beautiful French girlfriend, but I never asked.

Tough Times In Russia

It was October 2003 and after almost ten months living in Moscow, Inna and I decided to move back to the UK.

Compared to the UK, living in Moscow is comparatively cheap. Our utility bills for our small apartment never normally came to more than the equivalent of around £20.00 a month, which covered everything: gas, electricity, rates, hot water and heating every hour of every day throughout the winter. Moscow's heating is communal; it's turned on in the middle of October and turned off the following April, once the temperature rises above ten degrees for a week. Apart from one month every summer, hot water is permanently available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week and you need never ever worry about the amount you use or the size of the bill through your letterbox; hot water and central heating is more or less exactly the same price each and every month regardless of the amount used. The one drawback is that the entire hot water network over the whole Moscow region is turned off in stages for between three weeks and a month every year while they supposedly carry out pipeline and boiler maintenance, servicing and repairs. This creates some very nasty smelly experiences when Muscovites, who haven't bathed properly for weeks, are jammed together at peak times on the metro. For many Russians, especially Russian men, personal hygiene is still very low on the list of priorities and deodorant a luxury many prefer to be without. For some strange reason, Russian men honestly believe it is masculine to smell of stale sweat and body odour and in my experience Russians are, without doubt, one of the smelliest nations on earth!

As well as extremely low utility bills, telephone calls between landlines within the Moscow region are free. This is great if you have

lots of friends and family to chat to but can sometimes make getting through to someone almost impossible. The antiquated landlines are often jammed and you can frequently find yourself talking to someone you didn't dial or listening to three or four other people speaking on the same line. As it can take up to two years to have a land-line installed, most people rely on mobile phones. Mobile phone companies take advantage of the landline fiasco by not only charging to make calls but also to receive them.

Although there are many kiosks, bazaars and provincial markets where groceries can be bought extremely cheaply, surprisingly food in most high street Moscow supermarkets is not that much cheaper than in the equivalent supermarkets in the UK. Everything is now available and every type of customer catered for. Throughout Moscow there are a huge variety of shops and stores, from wholesale supermarkets selling at hugely discounted prices, to top-of-the-range stores and delicatessens selling imported and luxury foods.

Fish and meat are generally a little cheaper than in the UK, vodka and most spirits a lot cheaper and cigarettes are only about twenty roubles (forty pence) a packet. Fruit and vegetables are around three-quarters of the price in the UK, although because of the climate Russian fruit and vegetables tend to be extremely seasonal; prices rise considerably during the winter when the country has to rely more and more on imports. Because of import duty, many foreign products are actually more expensive than in the UK. Imported wine is about the same price although Georgia, an ex-Soviet State which borders Russia, produces some excellent wine but even a basic bottle costs the equivalent of about eight UK pounds.

Because an enormous number of products are counterfeited you never actually know whether you are buying the product advertised or some very cheap local product bought in bulk and repackaged. To buy successfully you really do need to know exactly what you are buying, you need to know the source and make sure you only shop in most prominent, well known supermarkets, but even they occasionally get caught out as seen when a major high street pharmacy was caught selling counterfeit perfumes, and a huge supermarket chain accused of selling hundreds of fake and imitation goods. It is possible to save a lot of money on your weekly food bill by buying from street-vendors and corner shops, but it is almost guaranteed that most things would be phoney. Coffee, tea, cooking oil, olive oil, butter, cigarettes and tobacco,

all are counterfeited in huge quantities where really cheap basic products replace major brand names.

When I first moved to Moscow after selling my house and seperating from my daughter's mother, I had spent quite a few thousand pounds buying household items including a new television and video player, a CD player, a fax machine, new mobile phones and a good computer and printer. But by the end of the summer most of the capital from the sale of my house was gone and Inna and I were struggling to survive. We could, if we really wanted to, have lived a very basic life on relatively little money, but we didn't want to live a basic life and we didn't want to buy the poorest quality and cheapest products from the market and street vendors nor did we want to spend everyday cooped up in our apartment - Moscow is a huge, exciting, dynamic city with so many things to do and places to go. We could have scrimped and saved but instead we spent our money on the food we wanted to eat, occasional bottles of nice red wine and at least once a week we went out to a restaurant, or to the cinema, or an art gallery or museum. What was the point with living in Moscow if we couldn't experience it?

Inna was still working for the security company and every morning she woke very early and spent at least an hour or so commuting on the crowded, stuffy metro backwards and forwards to work. And from early morning until late in the evening, Monday to Friday I sat alone in the apartment staring at either the computer screen, or the four walls that surrounded me. It wasn't so bad in the summer as I could take the occasional walk to the park nearby or visit the gym, or at least open the windows to let in the fresh air and sounds of the street below, but in the winter when temperatures were frequently minus twenty or lower, being cooped up all alone every day was a real struggle.

However, we enjoyed living together and generally it was a lot of fun, and I hadn't had fun in a relationship for a long while. Inna and I spent busy weekends out and about sightseeing which compensated for my lonely weekdays on my own at the apartment. As the brief summer came and went and winter closed in, I became more and more depressed and downhearted - not just because of the bad weather but because our money was drying up and life in Moscow was not as idyllic as we had both hoped.

Although I earned a small amount of money writing the occasional article for UK magazines about different aspects of Russian life, it certainly wasn't enough to earn a living and finding full-time permanent work in Moscow was virtually impossible. Even though my wife was

Russian and theoretically I had every right to stay in the country, the Russian government makes employing foreigners extremely difficult and the process for obtaining residency and work permits extremely complicated and incredibly expensive. I considered looking for a security guarding job with a Western company, but the laws completely prohibited foreigners from working in that specific industry. The regulations surrounding the security industry are still as tight as it was during Soviet times, and the Government as paranoid. The only straightforward way a foreigner could legally work in the security industry was as a consultant for a Western company with a branch or representative office in Russia, which I had done many times, but those jobs were very few and far between and again not enough to make a full-time living from.

Also I hadn't made any real effort to thoroughly learn the Russian language. I was good at picking up swear words and impolite phrases, but found everything else such a struggle. Inna could say the same Russian word or phrase to me twenty times and I still couldn't remember it. Either my small brain had a particularly limited learning capacity, or the Russian language was extremely difficult. I prefer to think it was the latter and Inna proved it one evening when she read aloud from a magazine saying that Russian, along with Hungarian, was apparently one of the hardest languages in the world to learn, behind Chinese and Japanese. Apparently, according to the article, Saint Cyril and his brother Methodius invented the Cyrillic alphabet in the middle of the 9th century AD. They wanted to create a means for recording religious texts translated into the Slavic tongue of Moravia, but why they couldn't use the Latin text and had to go and invent a whole new alphabet I could never understand. Inna smiled thinking what an ignorant and lazy fool I was; if she could learn English why couldn't I learn Russia? Unlike French, German or Spanish, Russian has extremely complex verb ending structures and just as I learnt one way of saying something, Inna would turn around and tell me there were two or three other ways of saying the same sentence depending upon who it was being directed to and what it was about. Apart from more than a few embarrassing blunders, I had generally found learning French relatively easy and could more or less pronounce every word and every sentence and understood its structure, but the Russian lanuage bewildered me completely and, after a while, I gave up trying. Because I couldn't speak much Russian finding a well paid job with a foreign company was virtually impossible and working for a Russian company completely impossible.

So I relied on the occasional close protection contract, an occasional editorial or article, and my dwindling savings. It was almost nine years after my first contract looking after the banker and after the crisis of 1998 Moscow changed. I think people realised they had to change, they had to have a more stable society; a society for the future and not just for the day. Before the crisis people took each day as it came with little regard or plans or provisions for the future, and they mainly did whatever they could to survive. Because of the corruption and the crime, the complete distrust in the government and the police, people grabbed whatever they could, whenever they could because they never really knew what tomorrow would bring, or if in fact there would be a tomorrow. For years Yeltsin's post-communist free market reforms of 1993 had caused extensive hardship and extremely poor living conditions for the majority of Russians. Many remembered back to October 1993 when government tanks opened fire on the Whitehouse (Russia's government building) to quell an uprising that eventually caused 146 deaths. Most people thought that another similar uprising could, and would happen again if things didn't change. During the 1998 crisis, millions of people were made absolutely destitute; banks collapsed, businesses went bankrupt, and there was no foreign investment. People's life-savings literally disappeared overnight. Inna's grandparents had saved all their lives and had about 1000 roubles in their bank account. This was the equivalent to about £1000, a lot of money for many Russians, but two days later the banks collapsed, the rouble devalued, and their £1000 suddenly became just £20. What little trust there was in the economy and the country completely disappeared.

It took a few years after the crises for Russia's new economy to grow again. Slowly there was renewed confidence in the country and new investment. Moscow also became a lot safer; it was no longer one of the highest crime capitals of the world. The Mafia - organised crime groups and criminals gangs - although still prevalent within the Russian business community, no longer targeted foreigners and foreign investments; it seemed there was an unwritten decree that the government would leave the Mafia alone if the Mafia left foreigners and foreign businesses alone. Foreigners were no longer a legitimate target for extortion and could trade fairly freely and in relative safety.

Tourists flocked to the city and apart from the petty crime that takes place in any metropolis anywhere in the world, people reported feeling a lot more secure and certainly much safer on the streets of Moscow than in many other cities around the world. The Russian attitude had changed,

which was great for foreigners but not so good for a British bodyguard specialising in close protection.

The Russian security industry was (and still is) booming, but the majority of the multi-billion dollar industry consists of hardware, access control and CCTV supply, installation, service and maintenance. Private manned guarding is also huge business, with almost every shop, restaurant, leisure, factory and office complex employing teams of security guards, but close protection was no longer a major part of the security industry, especially the protection of foreigners. Work had more or less dried up. Russian entrepreneurs and celebrities still (and will probably always) need teams of armed guards to protect them from business competitors, fanatics, extortion, kidnapping and from everyday petty criminals, but in this new safer environment the need for the majority of foreigners to employ full-time bodyguards had disappeared almost completely. Apart from the occasional visiting pop star or the chairman of a multi-national company, very few visitors to Russia now considered themselves at risk.

I couldn't find full-time work, we had very little cash left and there wasn't enough bodyguarding work to justify us staying in Moscow full-time. Inna and I came to the conclusion that we might have a much better life if we moved back to the UK.

Inna told her parents who were a little shocked, but they understood how difficult it was for me to cope. I wasn't an ex-pat, earning an ex-pat's wage living an ex-pat's life, I was living life like a Russian and it was hard enough for Russians to cope, let alone a foreigner. England is still perceived as the land of opportunity and her parents also believed that we could eventually do a lot better in England than we ever could in Russia. I had really hoped things would have worked out for us in Russia; living there can be so much fun and so exciting and a million miles from the stability and relative monotony of dreary England. But is just wasn't to be and so we got rid of the possessions we had; the TV, computer, CD player were all sold for less than half the price we had paid just a few months earlier. I gave some of my old clothes to our neighbour who, although a lecturer at the Moscow State University, had little money and, like the majority of Russians, struggled to survive. What little else we had left we packed into two suitcases. As I needed time to find suitable accommodation, at the end of October 2003 I made my way back to the UK a week or so ahead of Inna.

Former night-club manager and long-time friend Mark Ovenden met me at Heathrow airport and I spent a night at his house in Bracknell,

about fifteen miles south of the airport. Obviously I didn't have a car so, until I settled down and found some work, he kindly lent me his old work's white Astra Estate. Although it had done a trillion miles, it was a work-horse and had never let him down, and I was hoping it wouldn't let me down either. I had barely enough money left for a months' deposit on rented accommodation and certainly didn't have enough to buy even the cheapest car so I was grateful for his kindness; being without transport is never easy, especially when I had an apartment to look for and work to find.

The following day I woke up bright and early and, after a couple of cups of strong black coffee and a piece of toast with real English marmalade - which I hadn't had for ten months - I drove the two hundred miles to Norwich. As I drove down the A11 into the city I wondered for the hundredth time whether I had made the right decision. It felt a little strange being back in England. I hadn't been back forty-eight hours and I somehow already missed Moscow and I was already wondering how long it would be before I would want to start searching for somewhere else to live! Why do I constantly search for alternatives? Why can't I find contentment and settle in one place? Why do I always want something else, something different? Would Inna ever calm my desire to travel and to experience? I am responsible for my own destiny, my own fate and fortune, or lack of it and we are all products of our own circumstance. Some people can put up with relative boredom and monotony for stability, some people can lead competitive lives in order to have the best and to impress, but me? My life has continually been a series of ups and downs, never really stable or consistent, never really heading in one main purposeful direction. I have always had so many paths and routes to choose from and I always seem to choose the wrong one! Why is this? I recognise that, because of the way I am, I will always look for alternatives; somewhere different to go, something different to do but each and every one of us occasionally needs a little luck to help guide us on our way down that rocky path of life, and I dearly wished that just now and then luck would occasionally shine my way. Some would say that you make your own luck in life, but I disagree. Sometimes good things happen for no apparent reason, and the opposite is also very true. We are not just a product of our own actions but of the actions of others which is, in many cases, totally beyond our control or influence. After a great many years of living a rather tumultuous, chaotic life I recognise that I will probably never be lucky enough to be guided down the right path - I will have to search for it myself.

Maybe in Moscow I ight have eventually found a good job with a good salary. Maybe I could have studied Russian a bit harder. Maybe I could have sold more articles to more newspapers and magazines and maybe I could have sourced more security or protection contracts. Maybe Inna and I could have been more frugal and saved a little more money and thus been able to stay in Moscow a little bit longer, and maybe I could have developed more opportunities had I tried a little harder.

Lots of 'maybes'.

Was my whole life nothing more than just a 'maybe'?

The fact was that I was back in the UK driving into my home town of Norwich to start yet another completely new life, one again with nothing more than two bags of old clothes. Yet again I didn't have a fucking clue what I was going to do or where this was all going to eventually lead.

It was strange and surreal and incredibly bizarre driving into Norwich; a city I had grown up in but had not returned to for about thirteen years. Even though my daughter was still living with her mother and half-sister on the outskirts of Manchester, I knew I didn't want to return to the North West. I would have loved to have been near her, and had already called to tell her I was back in England (and would be up to see her as soon as I could), but I knew that if I was back in Manchester I would very quickly fall back into working the doors five or six nights a week. With all the contacts I had, and all the doormen I knew, it would have been inevitable. After my last door in Wilmslow I vowed never to return to the industry again; I had served a very long apprenticeship, I had done my time, been in more than my fair share of fights, dealt with enough knobheads and arseholes to last a lifetime, been threatened more times than I can remember, been stabbed and shot at and I was feeling far too old to go back to that life. I was retired.

I had a new life and a new wife.

Inna knew little about my past and I wanted it to remain that way. I wanted a different life for her, not a life of violence and aggression, of me coming home at three or four in the morning smelling of smoke and drink with blood on my shirt and some girl's knickers under the car seat. I didn't want her worrying every time I went out the front door as to whether I would be coming back in one piece. The doors are a single man's life, a single man's Nirvana and certainly not a life for a newly married couple. I was determined to stay away from it and I so knew I had to stay away from Manchester. I also knew that, with what little

money I had and the high prices of decent accommodation, if we did move to the NW, we could only afford to live in a poorer suburb of Manchester and I really didn't want to bring Inna all the way from Moscow to a run-down scruffy-looking inner-city district. Inna and I had briefly visited Manchester a few months' previously, when I had to return to the UK to renew my Russian visa. While my passport was being processed at the visa agency, we decided to spend a couple of nights in the North West where I could see my daughter. We had booked ourselves into the Premier Lodge Hotel on Deansgate Locks and, while Inna strolled around the city exploring its museums and art galleries, I spent a day with my daughter. That evening we strolled around the city popping into a few bars and clubs, saying hello to a few people I knew from the past. As the evening wore on Inna became more and more appalled and disgusted at the behaviour of people on the streets. Drunken girls screamed and shouted obscenities, groups of aggressive youths hung around spoiling for a fight, people staggered about drunkenly unable to even walk properly. She had never seen anything like it! I tried to explain that it was called 'binge drinking', the scourge of the British night-club culture. It was the same in almost every major city around the UK; idiots with two-cells for brains drank as much as they could in as little time as they could and then behaved a badly as they could. She asked why? I had no answer. She found it impossible to understand their moronic mentality as very few would ever behave in such a way in Moscow. I have seen well-dressed middle-aged couples leisurely walking arm-in-arm safely through Moscow city centre late at night, which could never happen in most major cities of England. Inna thought that Manchester city centre at two in the morning was probably one of the most disgusting, uncivilised places in the world and I agreed. I am certainly not easily intimidated but I felt far safer in Moscow at night than in Manchester. Most Westerners have the impression that Moscow is a crime ridden, gangster controlled and extremely violent city, but for the majority of people this is not true; most people feel fairly safe and rarely witness any form of violence or aggression. Why? Because the police do not tolerate it, not in any shape or form. The Russian police have the power to stop and search, regardless of whether or not they believe a crime has been committed. They have the power to check identity papers and anyone not carrying proper identification is quickly hauled off to the police station for questioning and a spell in prison, which is not for the faint-hearted. The police also have the capability, ability and the authority to batter thugs and yobs senseless. I do not believe in communism or totalitarianism, but

during the communist era there was no crime at all. Zero. Why? Because you were quite literally terrified for your life and even today most people in Russia are still scared of the police; nobody wants to end up looking through the bars of a Russian prison. The police can more or less do exactly what they want and to whom they want, with little or no comeback. There is no accountability and practically no human rights, and you certainly will not get offered a nice cup of tea after you get nicked. In Russia you are seen as being guilty until you can prove your innocence. Because of this, street violence, drunkenness and public disorder are tiny compared to our so-called civilised society in the West. The Russian police are corrupt and ruthless and nasty, but at least they keep law and order.

Inna told me she would never, ever want to live in such a degrading, undignified city and definitely, one hundred percent, did she never want to live in Manchester.

Compared to Manchester, Norwich is a charming, picturesque, clean, beautiful city, still relatively provincial and fairly inexpensive. I had fond memories of growing up in the city; its beautiful Cathedral and the pretty, historical Cathedral Close, the quiet cobbled streets of Elm Hill, the majestic Norman Castle standing guard on the hill overlooking the city and the traditional multi-coloured roofs of the market in the centre. During those long years I had been away from the city, Norwich had experienced huge changes; a new glass fronted Forum housing a new library (the old one on the same site had burnt down a few years previously), a new giant indoor shopping mall with a second, equally as big, mall under construction, a bustling riverside complex of pubs and clubs and cinemas, and more restaurants, cafes, shops and boutiques than I could ever remember. It seemed Norwich had everything, I felt sure Inna would love living there and it would definitely be a lot nicer than living in the suburbs of Manchester.

After a few days of scouring the classified adverts in the local newspaper and viewing a number of small one-bed apartments I eventually found a nice little place about twenty minutes walk from the city centre. It was a ground floor flat at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in a lovely tree-lined residential area. It was tiny, with just one small bedroom, a slightly bigger living room, a miniature bathroom and kitchen but it had a pretty garden at the rear which wasn't overlooked. I said, 'yes' as soon as I saw it and immediately paid a deposit. The apartment was totally unfurnished and that first night I ordered a pizza

takeaway and slept on the floor under my coat with my jumper as a pillow as I had no furniture or possessions, just the two bags of clothing.

Even though I didn't have any money, nor was I sure where (or when) the next pound was going to come from, I wanted to make the apartment as welcoming as I could for when Inna arrived, so the next day, stiff, aching and very cold, I traipsed from one second-hand shop to another searching for the cheapest double-bed I could possibly find. I then went from shop to shop looking for kitchen utensils, pots and pans. From a discount shop I bought a wafer-thin cream throw-over to hide the miserable state of an old dilapidated sofa I had borrowed, along with an antiquated TV set - from a friend. I wasn't ashamed of having nothing but I wanted to make the nothing we had seem like something.

Three days after moving in I drove back to Heathrow airport to meet Inna's flight from Moscow. We had only been separated a few days but I had missed her and, as we drove back to Norwich, chatted cheerfully, happy to be back together again. I told her everything I had been up to and nervously warned her about the poor state of what little furniture we had. She laughed. She didn't care - she was Russian.

Inna's eyes lit up as we approached our new little home. The neighbourhood was neat and really nice and made a good first impression. I wanted to show her the quaint little garden first so I parked the car on the road at the front and, leaving the bags in the boot, took Inna along the little path around the side of the building to the back garden. The gold, red, yellow and brown carpet of leaves gave the small garden a mysterious autumnal appearance, she smiled as she imagined sitting on the small green lawn in the summer listening to the birds and the bumblebees, surrounded by the different coloured rose bushes the previous tenant had kindly left behind. Because Inna had lived in apartment blocks all her life, this was the first garden she had ever known.

The building was made up of just four apartments, two opposite each other on the ground floor and two opposite each other on the second floor. Our apartment was on the ground floor with the rear garden overlooking our bedroom. The neighbour above had the front garden which overlooked our living room. We were lucky having the back garden as the front was just a dull area of unkempt grass which bordered onto the path, the road and the rows of parked cars. Our garden at the back was pretty, immaculately tended and totally secluded. Inna had also never lived in an apartment block which was just one storey high; her parents lived on the eighth floor of a fifteen story block and in Moscow,

Inna and I previously lived on the sixth floor of a twenty-two story block.

As we entered the apartment the tiny bathroom was directly on the left with the bedroom ahead. The tiny hall then turned right with the living room on the left and the kitchen ahead. Although sparsely furnished with whatever cheap, or free, furniture I had managed to find and scrounge, the rooms were nevertheless clean and freshly decorated, and I had placed a vase of freshly cut flowers on the kitchen window, making the whole place more colourful and nicely scented.

We ate our first evening meal sat bolt upright on an incredibly uncomfortable sofa watching a shadowy picture on an extremely old television.

Although we were married, Inna was only allowed to enter the UK on a temporary six-month visa which did not allow her to work. In order to prove that our marriage was legitimate and had not been arranged to gain illegal entry into the country, the British government issued Inna with a temporary visa. After six months and proof that we were still together in a legitimate marriage, she could then apply for a two-year visa with work permit. This meant for the first six months I had to financially support her. I had enough money to just about pay the one month rent in advance and the deposit on the apartment, but I had no money coming in and just a couple of hundred pounds left of my savings. We knew this wouldn't last long so the next morning, while Inna slept and recovered from her flight, I toured all the employment agencies looking for work. I desperately needed a job, and quickly.

By the end of the first week an agency had promised me a job cleaning cars. The following Monday morning I woke up at 6am and, with my head low and desperate for money, went to work.

As a bodyguard I had earned around £35 an hour, but I wasn't even going to earn that in a day cleaning cars. I felt ashamed and embarrassed and extremely pissed off. I had done so much, in all sorts of strange and wonderful places around the world and now I was reduced to valeting for a minimum wage. Like most jobs, I was paid a week in arrears and the last few days before my first weeks wages Inna and I had nothing to eat but porridge. We were completely destitute.

Although we had no money and very few possessions we didn't forget our promises to Maria, the disabled girl we had met begging in Moscow. We set up a small fund called The Maria Foundation to try to raise some money for her. On our Sundays off, Inna and I set about collecting money by trekking around the streets of Norwich putting

leaflets through people's doors. Slowly money for Maria trickled in. We knew we couldn't help every beggar that sat by the side of Moscow's roads and pavements, there were just so many, but we had made a promise to help just the one, and had hopes of eventually being able to change Maria and her son's life. Inna and I contacted an Icelandic prosthetic company called Össur who promised Maria new prosthetic legs. As time went on, even though we were struggling even to eat on my wage cleaning cars, we managed to raise money and support and, for the first time in almost nineteen years, Maria was eventually able to walk properly again. Although some people manage to help a great many people throughout their lifetime, we had only managed to help just the one, however, it gave us a little joy knowing that, despite our own poverty and hardship, we managed to take a girl from a life of squalor, begging for a living, into a new, more 'normal' life.

After a few months valeting, the company needed a driver and so I was promoted to the occasional day delivering cars around the UK. This was much better than cleaning cars as at least I was out on the road two or three days a week with my own thoughts and plans for the future. However, the money I made every week did not even cover our outgoings and so I had to quickly find other ways of bringing in a few extra pennies. Just when things we getting desperate, Dan Sommer of the Worldwide Federation of Bodyguards sent me an e-mail.

I was one of the original founders and was still a director of the WFB, but in name only as I hadn't had much contact with the organisation since an Icelandic subsidiary of the international security company Securitas bought the organisation three years earlier in the year 2000. Dan was Securitas' Operations Manager and director of its subsidiary GEO and came to England a year previous to that, in 1999, to attend one of my close protection training courses. He was impressed with both the training and the organisation and had an idea about developing a close protection wing of Securitas in Iceland. After my partner disappeared in the Congo on a private military contract, he offered to buy the company. However, a few months later, after setting up a new WFB office at the Regus centre in Slough, GEO decided to close down operations. They probably realised that it wasn't going to be as profitable as they perhaps had initially hoped and for almost three years they didn't do anything more with the organisation. It was such a shame as the WFB had grown to be globally recognised; almost everyone in the industry had heard of it and many of its students had gone onto work around the world.

Dan eventually left Securitas and GEO to set up his own business and bought what was left of the WFB for a fraction of the original selling price. He then e-mailed me asking if I would be interested in starting up a WFB international membership programme. His approach had come at exactly the right time; Inna and I were struggling to survive and although the membership wouldn't be profitable for at least a couple of years, it would provide a small extra source of much needed income.

Naturally I jumped at the chance and immediately said 'yes'. I had always had grand long-term visions for the WFB and had always wanted the organisation to continue to be a leading, internationally recognised institution within the bodyguarding industry. The new WFB membership programme was going to be open to anyone in the industry, regardless of training and experience. From combat veterans with many years field experience to the novice yet to fulfil his or her first contract, amd the WFB individual membership programme would unite professionally trained bodyguards both in the UK and around the world into one organisation of like-minded professionals. Membership would include an ID card, membership certificate, a monthly newsletter, discounts on products and training courses and regular e-mails on security and protection contracts worldwide. I would get a commission on every new member that joined and my job was to attend to all applications, produce the monthly newsletters, search the internet and bodyguarding networks for jobs and contracts, as well as to promote and market the organisation and manage and enlarge the membership database. When its founders, former SAS Alan and King were running it, the WFB had a great reputation and was extremely popular but since GEO bought it, it had been left to rot. I already had a huge number of contacts within the security and bodyguarding industry and felt I could do as good a job of forming this new, unique membership programme as anyone else on the circuit. I would build the WFB into the biggest membership organisation of its kind. Although I couldn't quite give up cleaning and driving cars for a living, I visualised working for the WFB full-time and managing thousands of members and shoving the chamois leather up my bosses arse.

At the same time I also planned to start publishing a new magazine for the close protection industry. Four or five years previously I had tried to start a similar magazine called Close Protection, but after just a few issues and large losses I had to give it up. However, I had learnt a lot from that experience and recognised many of the mistakes I had made. After Dan Sommer had approached me about the WFB I realised that

WFB members would also give me a possible customer base for the magazine; those who joined the WFB were obviously interested in the industry and therefore might also buy my new magazine. So I decided to try again.

Before even having the format of the first magazine planned or any editorial, I started to market and promote the idea. I sent letters to the hundreds of friends and contacts in the industry and to every new WFB member. Called PROTECTION News, after a few weeks and lots of initial effort, a few subscriptions trickled in. The money from those subscribers enabled me to gather enough editorial and articles together to publish the first issue and, because the magazine was quarterly, I then had another three months to find more articles and editorials and enough subscribers to pay for the second issue. I found a local printer who digitally printed a few copies of the magazine at a time. And so it went on, issue by issue.

I recognised that it would be a very long time before I could make a profit, but I was finally back in business and covering my expenses. Inna and I had no money to do much else but at least we were paying our rent and bills.

After an extremely frugal and very fragile six months, struggling day by day and occasionally having to survive on porridge, Inna got her two-year visa and work permit and started working for Norwich Union Insurance. We had come through the worst and could now start to relax and enjoy ourselves again. With Inna working I could eventually give up driving and washing cars and concentrate not only on the WFB and PROTECTION News magazine but on writing another book.

The Security Industry's New Rules And Regulations

Whilst developing the WFB membership programme and publishing PROTECTION News magazine I also decided to start running three-day close protection training courses. I found a very good martial arts centre on the outskirts of Norwich where I could hire rooms at very good rates as most rooms were vacant during the day and the owner was glad of a little extra cash. These brief courses would just be an introduction to the industry; the intention was that if the students enjoyed the course they would then book a longer, more intensive, two to three week training course with me later in the year. I had always enjoyed instructing and teaching and had, over the past ten years, run a great many similar close protection courses, both in the UK and abroad. Three day courses were great as they were not too complicated and I could give students enough information to demonstrate that further,

intense study of each module in detail was absolutely necessary in order to gain the relevant practical skills and theoretical experience needed to enter the industry. Most people believe that bodyguarding was just a matter of looking good in a black suit and a pair of dark sunglasses and being able to 'look after yourself'. Few people realise the amount of planning and preparation required for even the simplest operation and the skills needed to be a truly proficient professional bodyguard exceeds almost every layman's expectations. A good bodyguard must not only have excellent basic bodyguarding skills and training; walking formation drills, vehicle embuss and debuss drills (getting in and out of vehicles), emergency evacuation drills, route reconnaissance and preparation, surveillance, surveillance detection, location planning, communications, control centre operations, administration and multi-cultural etiquette skills, but a good bodyguard must also be paramedic trained, defensive and evasive driver trained (as well as having good vehicle mechanical skills), have multi-car convoy driving skills, be an expert at topography and orientation, have at least one other foreign language (but preferably two), be proficient in the use of a full range of weapons from the knife all the way up to automatic firearms, have excellent disarming and disabling and self-defence skills and be an excellent organiser and communicator.

Back in 1988 Alan had talked me into attending an extensive six-week bodyguard training course with the SAS but, once in the field on operation, I quickly realised there were many things that I couldn't ever train for or learn on a training course. No matter how many years I spent in the industry, or how many operations I had been on, there were always new situations and problems to solve and I would never stopped learning. Those that thought they were professional bodyguards after just a two-week basic training course needed their heads seriously re-adjusting.

As I started to promote the courses and talk to people in the industry, I learned that the Security Industry Authority had finally implanted the new rules and regulations for the security industry in general and the bodyguarding industry in particular. Two years previously, when I finally packed up working the doors, I knew about the proposed plans to introduce a new national licence for door supervisor's. At that time it was just at the initial planning stage and hadn't yet been fully implemented, but by the time I had returned to the UK it was in action.

Since the 11th of April 2005 all door-supervisors were legally bound to be licensed by the SIA and thousands upon thousands of

applications for the new licence flooded into the SIA for processing causing a huge backlog and massive delays. Regardless of previous training or experience all door-staff had to re-train and apply for the new licence.

I have always considered myself a professional and over the years have attended various local authority door supervisor training courses, depending upon where I was working at the time. The last course I attended was in Macclesfield which gave me the Macclesfield County Council badge to work the door in Wilmslow, the last door I ever worked. I reluctantly took that course because Marcus, the venue licensee and my boss at that time, was caught by the council inspectors for employing unlicensed door-staff...me! Thankfully he just received a stern telling off and a slapped wrist and I was hastily enrolled onto the very next available training course. Luckily the cost of that course was covered by National Security Network, the security company I was working for at the time, as I had refused to pay; they asked me to move from Manchester to Wilmslow to sort out the trouble the unit was having with local gangsters. About twelve months previously I had attended a Manchester 'Doorsafe' door supervisor's course, and many years earlier I had also attended two intensive courses in Westminster and Ealing, London. I also had a Wigan and Liverpool door supervisor's licence. However, even though I had attended many training courses and had held many licences and had years of experience, I learned that should I ever want to go back to working the doors I would have to attend yet another training course for yet another licence, oh, and not only would I have to attend another course but I would also have to pay several hundred pounds for the privilege as well as £190 for the new three-year licence.

The SIA course syllabus was almost identical to the London, Manchester and Macclesfield courses. Course subjects covered included the role of door-staff, behavioural standards, civil and criminal law, searching, arrest and drug awareness, incident recording and crime scene preservation, licensing laws, health and safety and emergency procedures. I simply couldn't understand why someone like me, with so many other licences and training had to re-train.

In principle licensing door-staff was always a good idea, but like many inept and incompetent governmental organisations, putting it into practice was another thing completely. Their researchers and implementers were probably academics and administrators and managers of big multi-national security companies that had little involvement with actually working on the doors. I could easily believe that those actually

responsible for laying down the new laws had never spent a five hour shift standing frozen on a winter's night in a doorway of a busy pub dealing with drunken arseholes and troublemaking scumbags.

So County Council licences disappeared and everything was going to be run on a national basis, but why couldn't County Council licences be transferred to the new national licence, especially for someone that held multiple licences and had attended multiple training courses? It seemed to me the only reason was that the greedy and misguided government wanted to steal from the already generally impoverished door-staff, most of whom they had little or no respect for anyway. In their eyes door-staff were scum and anything that made life harder for us was good a thing.

Monopolies would be granted to government 'favoured' companies and organisations who stood to make huge amounts of money re-training thousands of new door-staff. It was yet another government instigated policy that almost everyone I knew in the industry viewed as completely unjust and unfair.

Yet there wasn't a single thing anyone could do about it.

I doubt whether the government and the Security Industry Authority asked actual door-supervisors for their advice and opinion, or for their input into this new proposal. I believe the government completely disregarded most of the thousands of hard-working staff directly on the front line. Door-staff had to pay more money for yet another training course and apply for yet another licence, even though some doormen, like me, had various council licences, had attended numerous courses and had been working the doors for years! We most certainly knew more about the business than most of the officials and trainers that had implemented this new system and I remembered a disturbing conversation with a colleague who grudgingly had to attend the new SIA training course and whose instructor proudly admitted to his students that he had spent every weekend for a whole month on the doors learning the business. After just eight evenings he considered himself experienced and knowledgeable enough to be able to instruct those veteran doormen that had spent their lifetime in the industry. SIA trainers were academics and teachers and many, if not most, were not door-staff who could teach from experience. This seemed to me both extremely unfair and very wrong and on principle I was determined not to conform.

However, in defence I must say that I do generally agree with the theory behind the idea that a licence - or some form of accountability - which would help rid the industry of a few of the unscrupulous criminals

and thugs with long police records whose only intention is to bully and intimidate and be as violent and aggressive as possible. However these bullies were genuinely very few and far between and I didn't think the new licences would ever fully get rid of them. However, new training would put young, inexperienced novice door-staff in considerable danger because suddenly there were no longer enough experienced licensed door-staff to cope with the growing demands and requirements of either licensed premises, club managers and the increasingly violent streets. Those hard, tough doormen who had worked the doors for years and who commanded a high level of respect from their customers, as well as from their own peer group, and could handle the worst situations, were no longer allowed to work. Luckily I was one of the very few that didn't actually have a criminal record; I have never once been arrested while working the doors and surprisingly I seem to have always been able to evade the police, escape detection, or 'gently' persuade a claimant to drop charges. However most experienced doormen with many years in the industry have, by default, obtained some form of criminal record and one of the conditions of the new SIA licence is that applicants should have a totally clean sheet. It is virtually impossible to have been on the doors night after night, year upon year without getting into some form of trouble. Good doormen that have had to respond to extreme violence with extreme violence and have been arrested for doing so have suddenly found themselves unemployable.

One of the main modules on the new SIA training course is conflict management but, from feedback I have received from students, none of the instructors have ever had to deal with large gangs of scumbag scrotes, who can't even spell the word 'conflict', and who were determined to come into your club regardless. The 'conflict management' module was taught by academics with little real-life street experience. In my opinion this 'talking your way out of potentially aggressive situations in a diplomatic and non-aggressive way' is totally bollocks and is probably only applicable to a very small percentage of the more exclusive wine bars. I thought about my good friend Pete - head doorman at one of the most notorious pubs in Wythenshawe, Manchester - as he tries to diplomatically talk his 'well-educated' and 'very well-behaved' clients out the front door after one too many. 'Fuck all that crap,' I could hear him shout as he waded in with the biggest pair of tattooed fists I have ever seen.

In their naivety the SIA seem to believe that this new licensing system will control both individuals working the doors and those directly

employing doormen. They think that by having proper controls and excluding anyone classed as ‘undesirable’, it will help control the behaviour of door-staff and reduce the amount of alcohol related violence. But I don’t think the academics at the SIA can read or write and must never watch the news. Statistics prove that violence is growing; alcohol related incidents are at an epidemic level, binge drinking is widespread and nobody anywhere in the UK feels particularly safe at night. Even the police admit they simply cannot cope. So instead of trying to make society and licensed premises a safer place it seems that things were getting considerably worse.

And not only was the SIA introducing new licences for door-staff, there was even talk about implementing new licences and a new training policy for the British bodyguarding industry. Licensing door-staff was one thing, but licensing protection officers was a completely different ball-game altogether and I didn’t understand the reasons why.

Almost all work within the close protection environment is handed out via word of mouth and almost always by referrals and recommendations within the industry. Unlike door-staff vacancies, you will never see an advert in the newspaper or at the local job-centre for bodyguards. The bodyguarding industry is close-knit and an extremely difficult business to enter; it is who you know and your proven experience that is the key to a successful career. A bodyguard will almost always be employed because of references and normally, if the operator is not known personally to the employer, because he or she has been recommended by someone else. A team leader or security manager would never employ someone just because he or she holds an SIA licence, especially when the risks to the client can be immense. The whole industry is based on trust, ethics and confidence and no-one in the industry will dream about employing purely on the basis of a licence.

And those that do will have real problems.

Contrary to what the SIA believe, I believe that standards within the close protection industry in the UK might well be lowered once the new laws and licensing are implemented. If the SIA police the industry as they propose and impose legal controls and restraints on employers, instead of focusing on finding the very best operators through contacts and recommendations, they will have to find operators only because they hold an SIA licence. They will be employed purely on the basis of the piece of paper they hold in their hand and not because they have a wealth of operational experience. Novice bodyguards with little or no actual operational experience could be left protecting very important people and

the consequences of this could potentially be catastrophic. After almost seventeen years in the industry I continue to learn and develop and have only been able to overcome some really serious situations and incidents because of my experience and knowledge in the field and not in the classroom or because I hold a stupid piece of paper.

The new SIA laws require that anyone entering the close protection industry must attend a 150 hour training course at an approved training academy. This course covers fifteen core subjects: introduction to the roles and responsibilities of the close protection operative, threat and risk assessment, surveillance awareness, operational planning, law and legislation, interpersonal skills, close protection team work, reconnaissance, close protection foot techniques, route selection, use of close protection vehicle techniques, search awareness, incidents and dilemmas, venue based security, communication and conflict management skills. As well as these 150 hours, all students must also have a four day First Aid at Work course as approved by the Health and Safety Executive.

Initially there were no exemptions but, due to a huge amount of pressure from the industry, those people who have attended a Special Air Service regiment Body Guard Course, Royal Military Police Close Protection Course, Metropolitan Police Royalty Protection/Special Branch Close Protection Course or a Police National Close Protection Course were exempt from attending the full SIA course, but still have to attend a twenty-four hour SIA approved refresher course and the knowledge test and practical skills assessment. Also those currently working in the field that could prove extensive prior training also need not attend the full length SIA course but could opt to take the twenty-four hour SIA approved refresher course and the knowledge test and practical skills assessment.

Throughout my career both as a doorman and bodyguard I have seen a huge amount of people enter the industries with little or no training and therefore I do understand the basic reasoning behind the issuing of licences and implementation of standards of training; if you are ultimately protecting someone's life then it is certainly imperative that you have the correct education and authorisation. However, those individuals that had only ever completed a minimum basic training almost always failed in their attempt to become employed. In all the years in the industry I have never once met anyone working after only attending a brief one week basic training course. The only people

consistently in work are those with a huge portfolio of training, qualifications and experience.

Before the new SIA licences, admittedly there were a few cowboys in the industry and a handful of unscrupulous training organisations whose only intention was to make a quick buck from those that knew little or nothing of the industry. But the close protection industry was mainly pretty decent and self-governing. Most close protection training organisations weren't just in it for the money, most were genuinely keen to extend and develop their business in a positive way.

Prior to the new rules, anyone could, in theory, start up their own close protection training school. However, this very rarely happened and those that ran successful schools were generally extremely knowledgeable operatives that had many years field experience, and who wanted to move away from operations into a more passive, training role. Starting-up a training school can be a very expensive business and a major capital investment and so-called cowboys would neither have the financial resources nor the time and commitment necessary. In 1988 I attended a six-week commercial bodyguard training course run by former members of 22SAS. There was no official accreditation and no licence at the end of it, but this course was recognised around the world solely because of the background and experience of the instructors.

So why were the SIA introducing new rules for this relatively tiny, isolated sector of the security industry? I believe the sole intention was to control yet another section of industry, make money from individuals, grant training contracts and monopolies to a small select number of training companies and implement more chaotic, unmanageable administration systems.

And so, from the 20th of March 2006, anyone wishing to enter the close protection industry and work on the front line as a close protection officer in the UK would have to be licensed. Close Protection Officers would have to pay at least £3000 to attend a four-week training course and then pay a further £190 every three years for a licence. Those who could prove that they had had previous bodyguard training (within three years), and who could also prove a certain amount of field experience would have to pay around £1000 to attend the refresher course.

As of 7th December 2005, just over three months before the deadline, only three people had been granted a licence with just forty five applications pending. Obviously a huge success!!

I quickly realised that if I was going ever going to be able to run full length close protection courses again I would need the accreditation of a

SIA approved training body, either the Buckinghamshire and Chiltern University College, Edexcel or the City and Guilds and I wasn't sure whether this would be possible. I really didn't fancy going through all the lengthy paperwork and adhering to all the unnecessary rules and regulations just to be able to do what I have been successfully doing for many years - I instructed with the WFB for over ten years and my students have gone onto successfully work in some of the worst environments in the world.

I didn't want to tarnish my reputation in the industry and so I realised would no longer be able to run long close protection training courses as anyone training with me would then have to attend another training course once the SIA licensing became law.

Doing The Doors

Because I couldn't afford to spend a great deal of money marketing my own three-day Introduction to Close Protection courses, I decided to distribute leaflets to all the doormen working the doors around the city. It had been a very long time since I last walked the streets of Norwich late at night and I immediately noticed considerably more nightclubs and bars than when I was part of the scene almost thirteen years previously.

The Ritzy and Central Park in Tombland - where I first started my career as a doorman - was closed and boarded up. Hy's nightclub opposite was also closed, as was the Tudor Hall on Rose Lane, which had changed owners and names numerous times and now was dilapidated and in ruins. Prince of Wales Road, running from Tombland down to the train station and to the new Riverside development was now the main hub of almost all the city's licensed premises. From a planning and policing point of view this made good sense and kept the city centre free from drunks and yobs. At two in the morning the whole area was packed with clubbers and revellers and, as I wandered about, looking at the night-life around me, I had forgotten how animated and dynamic life on the streets was.

As I started to walk down Prince of Wales Road I noticed the outline of a familiar stocky, shaven headed figure in a black bomber jacket standing chatting to a group of girls on the pavement outside The Prince of Wales pub. I immediately recognised the bulky shape; I hadn't seen Bob Etchells for almost thirteen years. He didn't initially recognise me, probably because he never expected to see me again, especially on a Saturday night outside his pub in Norwich, but as I approached and after a few seconds of uncertainly a wide grin appeared on his ugly face.

Working the doors becomes part of your blood, of your character, of who you are. The environment, the authority, the excitement makes the job virtually impossible to give up. Apart from looking slightly older Bob was still the showman, although I felt he had calmed down a bit since our early mad days together working at the Ritzy. He had noticeably matured, both as a person and a doorman, but the doors were still an ingrained, integral part of his life. It was who he was. He told me he had a full-time day job at a local foundry but still worked the doors each and every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. He could never give it up.

As punters came and went, we stood on the doorstep chatting. Apart from one massive ominous black cloud looming over the horizon, Bob generally liked his life. He had a good job, a nice house; he had settled down and was planning to get married. However, a few months previously he had been arrested for possessing an illegal firearm, a sawn off shotgun a friend had asked him to store. Apparently he was set up, and a few days after agreeing to look after the weapon, the police came knocking on his door in full force brandishing a search warrant. It took just a few minutes for them to find the weapon and Bob was arrested and immediately charged. He told me he was on police bail currently waiting for a hearing date. (In the summer of 2005, while I was in Moscow for The Olive Group, Bob Etchells was tried, found guilty and sentenced to five years imprisonment. At the time of writing this book he is currently in Norwich prison serving out his sentence).

Like many veteran doormen Bob was undoubtedly a hard man but he would never brag or boast or start trouble. But if trouble came knocking he would end it as aggressively and as swiftly as he could. He was lucky, except for a few days on minor driving offences he had never served any prison time and all through his long career on the doors had never once been found guilty of any violent offences. Sadly, like almost all the veteran doormen I knew, bad luck finally caught up with him. By the time he gets out of prison Bob will be almost fifty years old and the SIA licensing system will be in full force with its limitations and restrictions fully implemented and imposed. Bob will never be allowed to legally work the doors again.

Bob taught me everything I needed to know back in the early 80's when I first started my career at Ritzy. Bob showed me the art of working a good door, of humility and respect and of survival, and I was saddened when I heard of long prison sentence. Without his early initial instruction and guidance I doubt I would have survived for as long as I

did, or become the person I am now, and I often wonder what would have become of me had I never applied for my first job on the doors. When I first started I was an innocent, naïve and extremely pathetic excuse for a doorman who hadn't even seen a fight let alone be involved in one. I wore a jumper underneath my shirt to make me look bigger and my only real purpose for working in a nightclub was to get laid as much as possible.

For me, the 80's were the best times on the doors. It was a fun, vibrant, dynamic time where we felt little could go wrong and we could do whatever we wanted. It was the age of the discothèque phenomenon was rapidly developing into a huge industry. Although doormen had been working in pubs and clubs for many years, back in the 80's the role and work of professional door-staff was not considered part of the security industry. There was little formal training; you learned the job the hard way by working directly on the front-line. Those who didn't learn the correct methods and proper approach, and those who couldn't handle themselves or were slow to grasp the rudiments of working the door didn't last very long. Many doormen came and went, some leaving the industry with horrific injuries.

When I first worked the doors at Ritzy, a doorman called Carl joined the team. He was a decent lad and, unlike many at that time, he was honest and conscientious and really did try to do his very best. He quickly did whatever he was told, by both Bob Etchells who was head doorman at the time, and the Ritzy management. Although I didn't speak to him that often I did quite like Carl, he had a good personality and was friendly to almost everyone, which was fairly unusual as a lot of doorman had attitude and many thought they were above everyone and everything else and treated those around them with contempt. But Carl was all right but the only problem was that he wasn't a doorman. He didn't look like a doorman and he didn't act like a doorman.

Theoretically I suppose, back then he was the very first of what would be today's new- school of door-staff - but twenty years too soon. I do believe that doormen should look like doormen. Doormen are not electricians or plumbers or HGV drivers where anyone, no matter what they look like or who they are, can enter the trade. A doorman should be a physical and psychological deterrent; otherwise there is no point in having door-staff. Trouble-makers must understand what they will be up against if they cause trouble. Celebrities often have huge monsters as part of their security detail, not because they are particularly good at what they do but purely because they are a deterrent. However hard or mad

you are, most people will think twice about taking on someone twice their size and as mean-looking as fuck. Size is not everything, but you have to at least look the part and Carl was about as far from the look of a doorman as you could possible get. He was about five foot six, skinny and had red hair and freckles.

Up in the staff-room before the club opened, the assistant manageress introduced Carl to the rest of the door-team. Snide sniggering and discreet piss-taking followed, and genuine dismay and resentment that someone looking like him was to be part of the door team. We all wondered why and questioned the General Manager's choice as he was an ex-doorman himself and knew the game better than most. A pissed off Bob Etchells stormed from the staff-room demanding to know what an earth was going on, and what the fuck was the GM doing by putting Carl into the door-team. After a few minutes of heated, animated discussion Bob sheepishly returned to the staff-room and told us that the manager was actually doing his wife a favour. Carl was her cousin, he had always wanted to work as a doorman and she told him that he could work at Ritzy during the summer holidays before he went back to University.

'Why couldn't he work behind the fucking bar?' Bob argued.

'Because he wants to work as a doorman,' came the GM's bad-tempered reply, 'so look after him, OK?' As well as running one of the busiest doors in Norwich and managing a team of up to twelve doormen, Bob also had to keep a close eye on the manager's wife's cousin. Anyway, it would only be for eight weeks, what on earth could go wrong?

If he saw trouble, Carl was firmly instructed to wait for backup and to never go into any situation alone; he was to press the nearest alarm button and just wait. Although resolutely loyal to both Bob and the GM, most of the doorman secretly vowed not to help Carl, he was resented by most of the door-staff; he was an outsider and had no place in the team. But neither Bob nor I really wanted to see him in any sort of trouble, I thought he was a genuinely decent lad and I felt confident that if the shit did hit the fan none of the other doormen would actually standby and watch him get a beating, would they?

It was the summer, many people were away on vacation and the club wasn't as busy as it normally was. With about a twenty percent drop in customers, July and August were always fairly quiet months, which was good as we could also take our holidays without leaving the team too short-staffed. After a few weeks most of the door-staff got to know

Carl - some of us more than others - and everyone generally agreed he was ‘sound’ but was definitely not a doorman and we were all counting down the days to his departure. We all eventually felt obligated to keep an eye on him and even jeered light-heartedly when Carl went home with a pretty young blond thing who had sat waiting for him at the end of one evening. As she sat in the corner of the club patiently waiting for the end of the evening, one by one all the doormen tried to convince her not to go home with him but to come home with them instead (some a little more crudely than others). She smiled politely and blushed and almost certainly thought what a bunch of utter wankers we all were.

It was the first Friday in September, about a week or so before the end of the summer holidays. The club was getting a little busier; the atmosphere was electric. The end of the summer was always a great time and the women looked particularly horny as they wore skimpy outfits and paraded around the club displaying their fit tanned bodies. That evening guys far outnumbered the gorgeous, tanned, flaunting, teasing girls; it was a bit like a natural history programme where the female ape is surrounded by her grunting male admirers, all wanting a shag.

At the Ritzy, Friday nights were always fight-nights. For some reason there had always been more groups of lads out together on a Friday than on any other night of the week, and too many lads hanging around at the end of an evening can cause tension and problems. Somehow we sensed there was going to be trouble. There is something instinctive about it; our primitive senses come into force and somehow we just know when things are not right. Occasionally we are wrong and the evening ends, the club empties and the feelings of impending trouble fade, but eighty percent of the time our instincts are accurate and when we sense there is going to be trouble, there generally is.

Apart from a couple of minor incidences on the front door, the night had passed fairly quietly. The slow dances kept the dance floor full and, although there still were quite a few groups of lads mingling around looking for that last opportunity to pull, they seemed harmless.

It was the last ten minutes of the evening, Bob was on the front door with four other doormen chatting amongst themselves and bidding ‘good night’ to the departing customers. A fellow doorman Julian and I were patrolling the club and a couple of other doormen were probably taking a sneaky late coffee and cigarette break in the staff-room, as they were nowhere to be seen. Carl was standing with his pretty, blond girlfriend by the back fire exit.

I nodded and smiled politely to them as we passed.

Suddenly, above the music, we heard a loud, piercing scream. We turned around to see Carl, on his knees with his hands covering his face which was literally spurting with blood. Towering above Carl was a customer with his arm raised high in the air. We could just make out a broken glass in his hand as it came crashing down on top of Carl's head. As we sprinted forward he turned, saw us and bolted down the back steps and out of the fire exit.

Carl was lying unconscious on the floor in a huge pool of blood pumping from both the back of his head and his face. His girlfriend was cowering over him screaming hysterically. I hurriedly took off my jacket and wrapped it tightly over his wounds to try and stem the river of red, while shouting at everyone that had suddenly gathered around, for someone to call an ambulance. Julian sprinted down the back exit and out of the club after the culprit.

The other doormen and the General Manager quickly appeared and, with our jackets and great wads of tissues from the gent's toilets, eventually managed to slow the bleeding. The manager looked pale and deeply shocked and was almost as hysterical as Carl's girlfriend.

'What the fuck happened?' he screamed at no-one in particular.

Between sobs she quickly explained that someone had come over to them and asked her for a dance. Carl had politely said that she was with him. Apparently he then said 'So? Who the fuck are you?' Carl told him to leave her alone and then he suddenly shoved the glass in his face.

That was all it took to disfigure Carl for the rest of his life.

Carl was rushed to hospital.

Julian tried to find the culprit but there were two routes outside the back exit - left or right - and he obviously took the wrong one and in the early 80's most night-clubs did not have CCTV.

The police, who were parked in their Black Maria in the Cathedral bay opposite, quickly arrived and took statements but the only people that seemed to see anything was Carl and his girlfriend, and Carl wouldn't be able to talk properly for days. In an effort to catch the criminal, Carl's horrific injuries were plastered all over the local newspapers, but nobody came forward and no-one was ever caught. Carl spent ten days in hospital and a further two months recovering at home. He had over 100 stitches in his face and fifty at the back of his head and came within a millimetre of losing an eye.

He never returned to college and, as time passed, he became just another night-club glassing statistic and a grave warning to us all. His

experience demonstrated the potentially catastrophic consequences for the inexperienced doorman working the door.

Ritzy in Norwich was definitely the place to be. People came from all over the region and most weekends, with well over a thousand customers, the place was almost always full to capacity and there were normally long queues to get in. The venue had a new state-of-the-art lighting rig which was marvelled at in amazement. Subdued background music was played while the club filled and at about 10.30pm the DJ would then welcome everyone, on behalf of the management and staff, to Ritzy. Emerson, Lake and Palmer's Fanfare for the Common Man was then played and a full light show performed. During the light show our job was to try to prevent customers from getting onto the dance floor, which wasn't always easy as everyone wanted to dance! We would dash backwards and forwards ushering anyone on the dance floor off to the side where everybody would stand and stare up at the lighting rig as it flashed and sparkled and pulsated to the rhythm of the music. The closing finale always culminated with a giant gyrating light-ball which, spinning and flashing, slowly descended from the top of the ceiling into the centre of the dance-floor. After spinning and flashing and spinning a bit more it then ascended back into the depths of the rig. The lighting rig at Ritzy's was said to be one of the biggest and best lighting rigs in the UK at that time, and we were all proud to be standing under it.

Because of the technology involved and the profile of big night-clubs during that era, the Lighting Jockey was almost as respected and revered as the DJ. The lighting-jock's job was to program the rig with a variety of different computerised sequences, as well as operating it manually, like a pianist, to the individual pulses and beat of whatever tune was being played. The jock's job was also to dust the rig every week, perform any simple, basic repairs as well as to regularly change the bulbs and coloured gels. Applications for the position came from all over the UK and piled high on the manager's desk in his untidy office. Applicants would travel hundreds of miles for an interview and audition, but the new position eventually went to a gorgeous big breasted, tight waist, tiny-arsed nineteen year old called Suzie.

I was physically and emotionally stirred, not by the technology of the rig and its sacred status within the UK club scene, but by Suzie's arse. Every evening she insisted on wearing the tightest of shorts which slid seductively up her gorgeous tight bottom, displaying her cheeks in a most magnificent way. Even though she had the brain the size of a pea, she was irresistible and I felt like a love-struck teenager with a first-time

crush; which was slightly surprising as she never even once acknowledged my existence.

To my complete despair the DJ, who worked beside her each and every evening, rapidly got himself into the knickers she obviously didn't wear. Suzie was everything a young hormone-crazed doorman could ever want and to my utter delight a few weeks later I watched as Suzy stormed off the DJ console sobbing hysterically. She had found out that the DJ had shagged a pretty Liverpudlian who was in Norwich on holiday. As would be reasonably expected, the Liverpudlian returned to the Ritzy to see her new DJ boyfriend. Suzie, who had quickly sussed what was going on, broke down in tears.

Julian and I made a secret pact; a pact I simply couldn't resist. We made it our mission to see which one of us could shag her first.

As if to get back at her ex-DJ boyfriend, Suzie suddenly became a lot friendlier and infinitely more charming to all the door-staff. At the end of almost every evening, once we had kicked out the customers, she would come over, sit with us, drink a bottle of beer and flirt a little while I drooled and slobbered and stuttered like an utter prat. Although she still hadn't spoken to me directly, I was nevertheless totally besotted with her and felt in a strange, bizarre, stalking kind of way that we would eventually be together for all eternity. Physically she was just about perfect and endowed with everything a man could ever want, but mentally, saying she had a brain the size of a pea was probably being a little generous. Although we could definitely understand why the manager gave her the job, we could never ever work out how she managed to operate the complex controls of the lighting rig. But nevertheless she was fun and chatty and sexy and everyone enjoyed her company. And at the end of every evening, as she got up to leave, she would always look back at us all sitting there in a row like stupid schoolboys and give us a sexy shag-me smile.

Julian and I spent a couple of weeks boasting and bragging to each other as to who would get in there first, although neither of us had actually done a thing about it.

We were all talk.

Suddenly word was out that a doorman from Hy's nightclub across the road had asked her out. Julian and I both knew we had to act quickly, especially as the doorman in question was bigger than both of us put together and I wouldn't want to be stomping on his territory. Although I hadn't spoken more than a handful of words to Suzie I had to think of

something pretty quickly to get her to take notice of me before it got too serious between her and the monster from across the road.

It was a Saturday night. We had kicked out all the customers and most of the staff had also gone home. Julian, Bob and I sat together enjoying a cold Bud' when Suzie came over to where we were sitting. I looked up at her and smiled. For the first time ever she looked directly at me and smiled a warm, glorious, heavenly smile. My heart leapt. This was it, I thought to myself, I am going to make the first move and ask her to join us for a beer and then I would ask her out. Unfortunately it would have to be in front of both Bob and Julian, as there was no way I could get to talk to Suzie on my own, but I had to try. Julian and I had a pact and I shuddered at the thought of him getting in there first.

'Ready?' she suddenly looked at Julian and asked.

I looked over at Julian shocked. What was the fuck was going on?

'Ooops, left my jacket, back in a minute,' she said, turned and rushed back towards the DJ consul.

'What the fuck's going on?' I asked, half hushed, half shrieking.

'I'm going to give her a lift home,' he replied matter of factly, with a sly devious smirk on his face.

'Lift home?' I replied quickly as I saw her approaching. 'You don't have a fucking car!' But before Julian could answer she had returned, swinging her coat over her shoulders.

'OK, ready now,' she said smiling.

I watched in complete disbelief and envy as he gently put his hand on her shoulder and guided her out through the front doors, giving me the Victory sign behind her head.

I sat and stared miserably into my tasteless beer while Bob Etchells laughed hysterically.

'How the fuck did you give her a lift home when you haven't even got a fucking car?' I asked angrily on the phone the following day as soon as I woke up. I had woken him up; he told me to fuck off and slammed the phone down. I lay staring up at the ceiling feeling utterly depressed. My friend, my buddy, my pal, my best mate had shagged the girl of my dreams.

Julian and I competed with each other over anything and everything. We competed to lift more than the other in the gym and we competed over women. Our sole raison d'être was to try and shag more women than the other, which often included trying to shag each other's girlfriends too. Women, steroids and the gym was all we lived for - we had little else. Even though we had made a pact to see who could shag

Suzie first, it hurt when I lost; I had a schoolboy crush on her and in my naivety and innocence I genuinely believed that somehow Suzie and I were destined to be together.

'Wanker. Arsehole.' I pointlessly muttered to myself as I made a protein shake, read the previous day's newspaper, sulked and waited.

No call.

I watched a bit of daytime television, listened to some music, opened my book and sulked some more.

Still no call.

'What the fuck was going on?' I thought to myself. Maybe she was still there? Bastard.

It was about 2.30pm and I wanted to go training but I certainly didn't want to call Julian again; he would only think I was calling to ask about Suzie, which of course I would have been, but I had to act cool and not make out as though I was really fucking pissed off.

Suddenly the phone rang and I snatched it up.

'That was quick,' Julian said.

'Oh, I was just on the phone to my brother.' I lied, and then I asked casually and without any mention of Suzie: 'Are you training today?'

'No, bit knackered,' Julian replied. I could visualise a smug smirk on his fucking face. 'Wanker,' I thought silently to myself.

'Late night?' I asked cheerfully but slightly less casually.

'Got to sleep about six,' he said, emphasising the word sleep.

Bastard.

It was no good, I couldn't wait any longer. I had to know the worst. 'Well?' I asked. 'Was the deed done?'

'Oh yes' Julian replied arrogantly. I think he was as desperate to tell me as I was desperate to know. And then, almost without pausing for breath, he revealed everything.

Once Julian and Suzie were outside he told her that his car was actually parked outside his house so they would have to walk there first. He didn't live too far from the club and when they got to his place he pointed to his neighbour's black BMW saying that was his but he invited her in for a drink first, hoping she would say yes and not ask to be taken straight home. Otherwise, he said, he would have had to pretend that he couldn't find the keys and call a taxi. They had one beer, and then he quickly had a second and third and then he said he was probably too drunk to drive but promised to call a taxi. They had one more beer for the road and then another and she eventually left his bedroom at seven in the morning.

‘Didn’t she ask you to take her home this morning?’ I asked sullenly.

‘Not really,’ he concluded, ‘she said I should stay in bed and sleep and that she would get a taxi on her own,’ adding salt to the already gaping, bleeding wound.

Oh well, I thought, as I packed my training things and made my sad and lonely way to the gym. My time will come.

Yaren was undoubtedly off her tiny trolley. Julian introduced me to her one night at the Ritzy and we immediately started dating. With a name like Yaren she was obviously Jewish and the slightly spoilt only daughter of a local wealthy commercial estate agent. At around five foot three she was petite, with short dark hair, a stunning delicate face and gorgeous dark sexy eyes. She was undeniably very pretty but as mad as a fucking hatter. Julian was shagging her best friend Candy. Candy was also incredibly pretty but totally the opposite of Yaren; tall, leggy and blond and reasonably sensible and sane.

A couple of years previously, before I had started working the doors, I had spent a few weeks working as a glass-collector at Club 64 on the Island of Elba in Italy. It was at the end of the summer, I had finished my job in France as a camp-site courier and a friend Michael invited me to the island where he was working as a DJ. I caught a train from La Rochelle on the west coast of France all the way across Europe to Pisa, where I then caught a ferry over to Elba. Once on Elba I asked around and eventually found a bus that took me straight past the night-club. Michael was living in one tiny room above the club. There was a spare room next to his, but the night-club owner told me I could only stay if I agreed to work, as it was the end of the season and most of his staff had left. So I collected and washed glasses which gave me free accommodation and a little bit of pocket money to stay the few weeks until the end of Michael’s contract. While I was mooching from table to table collecting the empties I met a Swiss girl called Isabelle. She was on holiday and we had a brief fling for the few remaining days of her vacation. She went back to Switzerland and I returned to Norwich but we continued to keep in contact via letters and phone calls and I eventually invited her to the UK. However, the week before Isabelle was due to arrive, Julian had introduced me to Yaren. Before I understood how completely nutty she was, I thought Yaren was charming and pretty and sexy and being the greedy, arsehole I was, I tried to figure out the best way of seeing them both, which I knew wasn’t going to be particularly easy but definitely well worth the effort.

I had arranged to pick Isabelle up from Heathrow airport, but at that time I hadn't passed my driving test and therefore didn't have a driving licence, or a car. My driving instructor Bernie, who was a friend and frequent customer at Ritzy, agreed to lend me his car. I had already had three or four lessons with him so I knew the basics of driving - I knew roughly how and when to change gear and the whereabouts of the clutch, accelerator and break. I could also turn right and left and could more or less stop any time I wanted without stalling. I considered myself a pretty competent and fairly confident driver and going to Heathrow airport and back would be a doddle. I wasn't exactly sure why my driving instructor trusted me with his brand new car, maybe he thought the consequences of not lending it to me far outweighed the possibility of me getting stopped or crashing.

I confidently jumped into the driver's side, told Bernie not to worry and that everything would be fine, shoved it into first and kangaroo-jumped to the end of his cul-de-sac. I could see him in the mirror cringing into his hands, but before he could change his mind I forced it noisily into second gear and was gone.

As I made my way around the inner ring road and up Carrow Hill, a policeman suddenly stepped into the middle of the road and held up his hand for me to stop. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Holding his left palm steadily towards me, with his right-hand he beckoned to a large group of coppers emerging from a gated entrance. I nervously watched as line upon line of policemen crossed the road and disappeared into the building opposite. Once all the policemen had crossed he nodded, smiled and ushered me on my way. Trying desperately not to stall, or over-rev or kangaroo-hop, I cautiously eased the car into first gear and accelerated away as carefully and smoothly as I could.

Isabelle looked simply stunning as she strolled through the arrival's gate searching for my familiar, grinning face. It had been about two years since we last met, and then we had only spent a few days together. I kissed her politely on both cheeks and offered to take her bags. At first we were both understandably a little hesitant and nervous, but after an uncertain few minutes we quickly settled down and chatted happily as we made our way back towards the car.

As I didn't have a licence and had only driven a handful of times, mainly with a driving instructor sitting by my side, I had obviously never driven to Heathrow airport before. Because I had never driven to Heathrow airport I forgot to take notice of what level or in what row I had parked the car. As we approached the payment kiosk it suddenly

dawned on me that I had no idea where the car was. I remembered taking the elevator but had no idea from what level. Also, as I had only been in the car a few times, I hadn't taken too much notice of its make or model, but I did know it was small and blue. Isabelle and I spent the following forty-five minutes aimlessly searching each level of the car-park hoping to eventually find my small, blue car. Needless to say Isabelle wasn't very happy and things kind of went downhill since.

After finally finding the car and making our way out of the airport and onto the motorway, I questioned why the car was struggling to go anywhere and screaming insanely. Isabelle pointed down to the gear stick; I had forgotten to change from second into third gear. Although I tried to laugh it off, she really wasn't amused and I could see on her face that she probably thought what an absolute idiot I was. It wasn't a good start to what I had hoped would be a long-lasting, loving relationship.

I was sharing a house with my friend Billy, who also worked part-time as a doorman at Ritzy. Billy was a hard man, a great fighter and a great laugh. With his steel-like forehead he instantly triumphed in most fights. He was a welder by trade and all of us at Ritzy's were absolutely sure he had secretly implanted a reinforced steel plate from the bridge of his nose to the centre of his forehead as a head-butt from Billy sent almost everyone into oblivion. Billy also shagged more women than both Julian and I put together. At all times of the day and night there were different girls coming and going from his room, and on occasions one would go in at night and another completely different girl would emerge the following morning. Billy and I would always back each other up if one woman called or came round while we were in the arms, or between the legs, of someone else. Billy knew that Isabelle was coming to stay for a few days and that I had borrowed my driving instructor's car to pick her up from the airport, but before I woke up he had gone off to work and I had forgotten to tell him roughly what time we would be returning home.

Unbeknown to me, that afternoon Yaren had decided to pay me a visit. Billy, in his innocence and not realising she was intending to stay, let her in. She told him she was just popping by to leave me some food however, being as mad as she was, decided to change into a French maid's outfit and cook me a roast chicken and fresh vegetables. Initially Billy was highly amused as Yaren sauntered out of the bathroom wearing something entirely different from when she went in. As she hummed to herself and started to chop the vegetables it slowly dawned on him that she wasn't just popping by, but had every intention of staying, cooking

and waiting for me to return. As I happily made my way back to Norwich with a lovely Swiss girl sitting next to me, mad Yaren was in my kitchen dressed as a French maid cooking me supper. Mobile phones didn't exist back then and Billy had no way of warning me of the impending catastrophe.

It was a warm sunny afternoon and I carefully made my way around the chaotic M25 and up the A11 to Norwich, trying to remember to change gear now and then. Once we arrived I had planned to take Isabelle around Norwich sightseeing for a few hours and then out somewhere for a nice romantic evening meal.

I parked outside Billy's house on the opposite side of the road and took Isabelle's bags from the boot. We ambled slowly down the path towards the front door. As I fumbled for the key, the door suddenly burst open and Billy, looking ashen and extremely worried emerged and closed the door immediately behind him.

'Yaren's here,' he silently mouthed to me.

'Fuck,' I silently mouthed back, eyes wide with worry. I gulped heavily and breathed deeply and wondered what the fuck I was going to do.

'Sorry buddy but I couldn't do anything,' he whispered. Isabelle was standing slightly behind me wondering what on earth was going on.

I had to think quickly.

Isabelle had come all the way from Switzerland and I, after only a few driving lessons, had just driven to Heathrow airport and back. We were both extremely tired but couldn't go into the house as a mad Jew dressed as a French maid (although I didn't find out about that until later) was cooking me supper.

'You will have to take it straight back to him,' Billy quickly said angrily, loud enough for Isabelle to hear.

'Sorry?' I replied, confused.

'He needs the car back now! It is really urgent. He has been waiting for over an hour and desperately needs to take his mother to hospital.'

'Christ!' I exclaimed, 'I forgot.'

Isabelle looked really confused. I turned to her, 'I am really sorry but we have to take my friend's car straight back to him, I forgot all about it.'

'OK,' she replied indifferently, confirming to herself what complete knob I really was. What sort of person was I when I couldn't even remember that my friend, who was kind enough to lend me his car, had to take his mother to hospital?

Billy grabbed Isabelle's bags and, before the mad Jew appeared on the doorstep with a roast chicken in one hand and a carving knife in the other, we hastily made our way back across the garden to the car. I frantically ushered her inside, shoved the car into what I thought was first gear and rapidly accelerated backwards down the street, almost crashing into the car behind.

As we drew up outside Bernie's house I prayed he wasn't in and I could drop the keys through the letter box and get the fuck away but as we walked down the path towards his front door I noticed him standing by the window casually chatting on the phone. He didn't look like a man frantically waiting to take his mother to hospital. He looked over to us, smiled and waved. Shit, I thought to myself.

As he opened the door I quickly blurted. 'Sorry buddy, here are the keys. I know you are in a hurry so we won't stop. Hope your mother is OK.' I slammed the keys in his hand, winked and turned quickly to make a hasty retreat, leaving him gazing dumbfounded at us.

From losing the car at Heathrow and nearly blowing up its engine, to almost being caught red-handed by a knife-wielding Jew, things between Isabelle and I hadn't gone as smoothly as I had hoped and planned. I could tell that Isabelle felt she had made a terrible mistake coming to England. The few days we had spent together in Italy gave her no indication of what an utter idiot I was. I somehow sensed that this friendship was simply not meant to be. Needless to say that week with Isabelle was more or less a complete and utter failure. I slept on the floor in the spare room downstairs alongside Billy's dumbbells, lying awake for hours every night staring at the ceiling in the vague hope of hearing the sound of her light, delicate footsteps creeping softly down the stairs and a gentle tap-tap on the door. But they never came. After a couple of days pottering around Norwich together I could sense her longing to go back home. It was blatantly obvious, even from the first few minutes at the airport that, not in a million, trillion years, would there ever be any romance between us. She thought I was irresponsible, immature, self-centred and a complete idiot.

I think she just about got it right.

After a fairly awkward week we said our faltering, nervous farewells and I put Isabelle on the train back to the airport.

Yaren, after waiting for me at Billy's for almost three hours, eventually left in a rage leaving Billy to demolish the burnt chicken on his own. At least he was amply rewarded for his quick thinking.

I never saw Yaren again.

About ten years later I got a surprising letter via my parent's address. It was an invitation to Isabelle's wedding in Lugano, Switzerland. For some strange, bizarre reason I decided to go and took a train from Norwich all the way to Switzerland. Isabelle met me at the station in Lugano. And I was instantly surprised to see how much she had changed. When she came to England she was a stunning, energetic, high-spirited twenty-two year old. At thirty-two, although still attractive she was no longer stunning and she seemed a lot more serious and mature and maybe a little boring. I wondered how much I hadn't changed, how much I hadn't matured, hadn't grown up and hadn't developed. After all, in-between close protection contracts, I was still working as a doorman and still leading a doorman's decadent, fairly corrupt and irresponsible life.

After pleasantries and chit-chat I was directed to a beautiful, new convertible Mercedes and driven to a café overlooking Lake Lugano to meet her future husband. Alberto, immaculately dressed, very formal and astute looking, reminded me of an immensely rich yet incredibly boring stock-broker.

Isabelle had arranged for me to stay in a friend's empty apartment up in the hills overlooking the beautiful lake. It was a tiny apartment, with just one small, sparsely furnished bedroom, a tiny kitchen and bathroom and a small living area with large French doors opening onto a small balcony with stunning views over the lake. It was simply idyllic; isolated, calm, beautiful, tranquil and I could have settled there in solitude forever. Her friend was mid-twenties, with long curly dark hair, dark clear skin and dark brown eyes. She was attractive, had a nice warm smile and, as with most of the women I meet, I fancied her. I tried to give her an occasional lingering look and furtive smile but she was having none of it - she was probably pre-warned and didn't want to know. Even ten years later and in a different country, it seemed my reputation had followed me. That evening we went to her parent's house for a meal, which was surreal and unsettling as not one of her family spoke English and I sat silently, foolishly not knowing what to say, where to look or what to do. I was just thankful for the free food.

The next day, as I stood at the back of the church watching Isabelle get married to boring Alberto, I wondered what the fuck I was doing there. What had motivated me to pay all that money and travel all that way to see an ex-girlfriend get married, who wasn't ever really my girlfriend and who hadn't liked me much anyway? What on earth had I hoped to achieve? As the wedding service progressed I decided to sneak

out and catch an early train home. They wouldn't miss me and I just wanted to get back to the place I knew and the people I felt most comfortable with.

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The 80's were a doorman's Nirvana - a world of shagging and violence, an arrogant, conceited world, a world of self-indulgence and self-importance. We would fight at least once or twice a week and, when I wasn't bloated and full of steroids, could generally pick up a different woman at the club almost every week, although I could never imagine why as I was always fairly unsure of myself and occasionally shy. But I never ever seemed to have any problems with that side of my life, although admittedly they certainly weren't always beauty queens.

Julian, on the other hand, was very confident and very sure of himself. Whereas I was much quieter and a lot more retiring and modest, he would strut around being bold and loud and self-assured. Julian and I got on well as both friends and working partners; confirming the theory that opposites attract. I would shag the shy ones and he shagged their extroverted friends, we then swapped and compared notes, if for no other reason than utter childishness and immaturity and a bloody good laugh.

Although I would always be fairly nervous and scared whenever I had to counter violence with violence, I didn't find violence difficult or complicated. I never saw myself as others would see me and I had built a reputation for being quite hard, brutal and ruthless. But I always worried about being beaten or of losing and I would always worry about going too far, of over-reacting. Because I never wanted to lose, I also acknowledged and recognised the lengths I would be prepared to go to in order to make sure that never, ever happened which would sometimes include extreme viciousness. But overall I genuinely believed I dealt with violence with caution and care and always tried to understand the psychology and motivation behind it.

Never once, throughout my career on the doors, have I ever boasted or bragged about a fight or the injuries I have dealt an opponent. For me, when a fight is over, it is over and done and forgotten. For many doormen boasting and bragging is part of the close comradeship they develop as a team, but I have always detested this and have never once mentioned any fight or violent situation apart, of course, as witness statements to the police which were often changed slightly to suit the circumstance.

Anger

A short while after the release of my first book Doing the Doors, a radio show presenter once asked me what exactly I had accomplished from spending my life working as a doorman and how had it affected me.

At the time of writing this book, I am forty-three years old and have been working on and off as a doorman since my early twenties. I have also had time working as a nightclub manager and have at times worked as a bodyguard and a trainer of bodyguards worldwide, but the majority of my working life has been spent in and around pubs and clubs looking after its customers, management and staff.

So what have I achieved from a life on the doors?

Apart from a detailed knowledge of various kinds of doors, handles, hinges and door-frames, what different doors look like and how they work, the know-how to open and close a door, and an awful lot about the type of people that pass backwards and forwards through that narrow space during the course of an average evening, sadly, to be truthful, I have actually achieved very little from a life on the doors. Although at times exciting, occasionally stressful and from time to time demanding, working the doors has, for the most part, greatly reduced any chances of me ever doing anything else in my life. In effect, a life on the door has made me unemployable; the job prospects for a forty-something year old veteran doorman are a little less than zero and if someone should ask whether they should follow in my footsteps I would resolutely yell ‘no!’

Sure, I can field strip an AK47 pretty quickly too, and can instantly recognise the components of an IED (Improvised Explosive Devise), I can floor an opponent in just a few seconds and I feel confident in preventing a group of drunken yobs from getting passed me, but when it comes to applying for other kinds of employment these things don’t sit particularly well on the average CV.

When I was trying to support my family in Wilmslow and ease our severe financial problems, I desperately wanted to get off the doors into a more ‘normal’ ordinary kind of job with a regular, guaranteed wage where I could climb the career ladder and eventually make something of my limited, imperfect life. I wanted to achieve more. I wanted to do more. I wanted to be more than just a doorman. Although I was working on the doors six nights a week, my salary still wasn’t nearly enough to cover all the weekly outgoings. To survive I borrowed from one credit card to pay another and my debts mounted up. From a relatively small debt of £5000 they ultimately spiralled to well over £20,000 and all the time I kept it as quiet as I could, hiding my worsening predicament from

my partner, desperately hoping I could find a job and eventually get back to relative normality.

Altogether I applied for over one hundred jobs, from trainee manager at Tesco to sales consultant for BMW, from a gardener for the council to sales assistant at Phones4U. Because I had no references and very limited work experience - apart from the doors and nobody wanted a doorman working for them - I received very few replies and those few that did reply informed me that I was unsuccessful before even being invited to an interview. In time I did get invited to a couple of interviews but they were for positions that paid on a commission basis only with no basic wage, so they had absolutely nothing to lose and could give a job to anyone. Although I was fairly articulate, presentable and extremely hard-working, I wasn't particularly well educated and so, as a professional doorman, I found there was little I could do to change my life. I was stuck.

And so a life on the doors really has made me virtually unemployable.

How else has it affected me?

Because I have worked in a violent, aggressive world for such a long time and have used violence to overcome many obstacles and problems, I find myself constantly thinking and acting in a hostile and aggressive way. Working the doors for as long as I have, has made my mindset infinitely more violent. Time and time again I turn mundane circumstances and situations into aggressive scenes and scenarios. My mind has become more brutal, my nature more aggressive, my attitude more hostile. Everyday situations that should normally be dealt with non-violently I handle violently and this has manifested itself into some very difficult circumstances.

Once such incident happened shortly after Inna and I had returned to live in England. Like every big city at around 5.30 in the afternoon, Norwich is congested and traffic is grindingly slow. While on the way back home after picking Inna up from work, I decided to take a short cut.; cutting out the traffic lights at the junction of Magdalen Street and Magpie Road, I decided to turn up Spencer Street and then down Beaconsfield Road. Beaconsfield Road is a narrow terrace-lined street with cars parked tightly together on each side leaving just enough room on the road for one car. As I drove down Beaconsfield Road, with a car following closely behind me, another car drove up from Magdalen Road. With nowhere to go we met halfway. Because I had a car directly behind me, and another behind that, I flashed and tooted my horn hoping the car

in front would reverse. But he refused. He just shrugged and sat there. I flashed and honked again but he just sat in his car with a stupid grin on his stupid face, refusing to move. I was sure he was just trying to be a tough-guy as there was no reason at all why he couldn't reverse back down into Magdalen Road and let us all pass. Exasperated and extremely pissed off I eventually got out and stormed over to his car. He quickly wound up his window up as he saw a huge red-faced, raging, seventeen stone ogre approach.

'I have two cars behind me,' I shouted angrily through the glass at his now nervous face staring straight ahead. He shrugged. 'Fucking move,' I shouted banging on the glass but he still remained in one position ignoring me. I banged again, harder. He turned to me and, through the relative safety of the glass window, said he wasn't going to back down into a main road, so we would all have to back up. I was fuming and wanted to smash the glass and drag that little arsehole through the window frame and give him a good kicking, but by then we had started to attract a little bit of attention; people stood around looking over at us wondering what was happening. Inna sat quietly and uneasily in our car. She knows what I am like when I 'lose it' and she was secretly hoping I would cool down, give in, back up and let him pass.

The driver of the car directly behind me got out and called over asking what was going on. I shouted that this arsehole, slamming the window again, refuses to move.

'Oh well,' he shrugged, turned to the cars behind and signalled for everyone to back up. He then got back into his car and started to reverse.

Inna beckoned me to get back into our car. Reluctantly, and after giving the arsehole's window one last hard bash which rocked the whole car, I stormed back to my vehicle and, following the others, angrily reversed into the side street letting him through.

I wish I hadn't given in, but I knew that we couldn't have stayed in the centre of the road forever, nor could I have battered the arsehole senseless. The attitude of the driver behind me was by far the best; shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly and moving away quietly and the situation was therefore quickly resolved. But I had a really hard time accepting having to back down and give up, and in my violent mind I could not figure out any other way of dealing with things.

This was not just one isolated event; it happens many times and through-out my normal everyday life. I was fuming as someone had parked in my clearly marked reserved parking place outside my house. Everyone has their own parking bay, which is marked by their house

number, but some arsehole had decided to park in my space and therefore there was nowhere for me to park. I considered parking in someone else's space, but then they would have had to find another space and the chain would go on and on. Couldn't the knobhead that parked in my space marked with my house number understand this relatively simple parking principle, or was he that stupid and selfish that he didn't care as long as he could park. I considered waiting next to his car, continually honking my horn until he appeared, but that would have disturbed everyone else around me which I clearly didn't want to do. I toyed with the idea of sticking a notice across his windscreen with adhesive glue or slashing his tyres and sliding my key ring down the side of his car but he might have me arrested for vandalism which I obviously didn't want. So instead I reluctantly parked on the street opposite and placed a polite note under his wiper while hoping to catch him getting into his car and then pulverise him into his seat.

At the time of writing this book, it has been almost three years since I last worked the door but I still cannot get hostility and aggression and violence out of my head; I still cannot find other calmer, politer ways of dealing with difficult situations and I worry that one day I will mistakenly revert to violence which might finally get me arrested. This what a life on the doors had done to me. I pride myself with trying to be humble, of not boasting and bragging, of not being an arsehole and I try to consider the thoughts and feelings of others around me, but when I encounter certain difficult situations I can sometimes find it very difficult to cope in a non-aggressive manner. Does this then mean that I am actually incapable of working the door ever again? Has this violent world in which I have spent most of my life turned me into some kind of freak who will never again be able to deal with difficult, confrontational situations in a passive, non-confrontational manner? Am I now a liability to myself and others around me? Has my immunity to violence made me hard and uncompromising? Is the reason why I want to spend the rest of my life in relative solitude because I know I simply cannot cope with the difficult and complicated world around me?

One such incident which caused me to be unreasonably violent happened a few months after returning to Norwich from Moscow. It was in the spring of 2004 and I was fearful that I would be arrested and finally banged up at Her Majesty's pleasure.

After a brief spell at the underground dungeon gym at CEYMS and before I joined Bodytronics on Oak Street, I spent a couple of months at Maximus on the outskirts of Norwich. Although they did have a few

fitness members as well as a handful of women, it was a very basic gym aimed chiefly at weight-trainers and bodybuilders. The good thing about Maximus was that it was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. On joining, members paid a small deposit and were given a key-card which they could use to gain entry at any time. There weren't many members and we were all trusted enough to respect the place and keep it clean and tidy. There was no office, no money on site and nothing much to steal anyway.

There was one main training hall with a small space for changing. About two thirds of the room was dedicated to barbells, dumbbells and free weights, and the other third to various pieces of resistance equipment and aerobic apparatus. It was definitely a 'spit and sawdust' place and was certainly good enough for me. I have never liked training in busy crowded gyms and have always preferred to train peacefully on my own. The afternoons were generally very busy and crowded with doormen so I would normally wake up early and get to the gym at around 8am when it was usually very quiet and I could get on whatever piece of equipment I needed.

It was mid-week and I was minding my own business super-setting chest with back. Apart from me there were only two others in the gym that morning and they were bicep curling in the corner. The biggest was wearing a white vest and, although a little fat, he looked a good eighteen to nineteen stone. He was probably about twenty-five years old, a little shorter than me and looked quite a size. His training partner was probably about the same age but he was a lot taller and therefore looked smaller in comparison. They were both training hard, lifting heavy and grunting loudly - as I used to train many years previously. I moved throughout the room using a mixture of free weights and equipment. I am not blatantly anti-social and will pass a few comments or greetings to anyone else training at the same time, but there is a time for training and a time for talking and in my opinion the two should never mix - if I wanted to socialise I would go to a pub and those in the gym who spend hours standing around chatting get on my fucking nerves. And anyway I almost always super-setted and it is virtually impossible to talk when going directly from one exercise to another.

The two youngsters had glanced over to me a couple of times but no more than you would look at anyone else training in the same place. After my last, relatively light, set of incline presses I hooked the bar back into the Smith Machine and smiled to myself thinking how I used to train hard and heavy when my sole objective was to get as big and as strong as

I could. But those days were long gone and I left that passion and fanaticism to the youngsters.

'What are you fucking laughing at?' a voice shouted over from where the two were training. At first I was startled and wondered if they were talking to me or someone else, but when I looked up there was nobody else in the room. The smaller of the two stood with his hands defiantly on his hips looking over to me.

'Sorry?' I asked, not apologising but questioning what he had just said.

'I saw you,' he said boldly. 'Fucking laughing at us.'

All I wanted was to train peacefully and quietly and get back home to Inna and a strawberry protein shake, and a couple of paranoid wankers were now going to spoil my whole fucking day. I was seething.

'You wrote that book didn't you?' He said, 'I have read about you. You think you are some fucking hard man and can take the piss?' He took one step closer but his friend put a hand against his chest.

'Leave it,' I heard him whisper.

Doing the Doors had been on the bookshelves for a few months and editorials and articles had appeared in various newspapers and magazines. although some publications preferred to make up stories and exaggerate rather than print the exact truth. In one magazine I was a mercenary that had killed over a hundred people with my bare hands and in another weekly men's magazine I was labelled. 'The toughest of the tough.' My publisher said there was no such thing as bad publicity, and he was probably right, I was generating interest in the book and it was selling well and I didn't really mind what was written about me, even though it might not have been exactly truthful, as long as it promoted the book.

I looked over at the two wankers standing defiantly in the corner of the gym. They must have been completely and utterly off their tiny trolleys and in a crazy world of their own. Not in my wildest imagination could I have predicted that someone would ever confront me with my book and what had been written about me in a men's magazine.

'Cunt,' I heard him say as he turned away and bent to pick up the barbell.

Now I was really pissed off. These arseholes, high on their own testosterone, let alone what they were obviously pumping into their system, thought they were tough and that they would somehow earn respect between each other by showing disrespect towards me. They obviously thought they were hard men and could say and do whatever

they wanted, to whomever they wanted and that everybody, frightened to retaliate, would cower down to them. From their attitude I thought that they might possibly be doorman who hadn't been working the doors for long. I had seen it so many times; young upstarts, fresh into the industry with inflated egos trying to prove themselves. These were the kind of knobheads that gave doormen a bad name. These were the wankers that tarnished us all with the title of thug and bully and yob and 'bouncer'.

They were now in deep shit.

They had started something for which I could see only one conclusion. There was no choice. There was no alternative. They had to be taught a really tough lesson which, hopefully, would change them forever.

But I didn't want any trouble. I had grown up and grown older and all I wanted was a quiet, peaceful, solitary life. I could have paid no attention to these two scrotes, ignored them completely and carried on training but that would have damaged my pride and my honour and ruined my reputation, which I could never let happen. They would also continue to do whatever they wanted to anyone else, at any time. They would become bullies and thugs, picking on the weak and timid and preying on the innocent. Or was it just me they were picking on? Because of my so-called reputation and because of what they might have read about me? Were they testing me? Did they want me to back down so they could boast and brag to their mates? And then what would happen, would their mates confront me and expect me to bow down to them too?

And if I ignored them, what would become of me? Would I have to ignore them a second or third or fourth time? Would I have to schedule my training at other times of the day so I wouldn't encounter them again? Would I have to turn away from all other intimidating situations and back down from anyone else that confronted me?

Should I let them get away with it? Was it best to 'turn the other cheek' or is 'an eye for an eye' the better choice.

Of course, I chose 'an eye for an eye'.

I had to deal with this problem there and then. Confrontational situations should always be resolved immediately, otherwise they can easily and very quickly grow and mutate into something nasty and totally out of control. I knew this particular situation had to be sorted out as aggressively as necessary in order to show these scumbags a lesson in humility and respect. I went into my fight mode and recognised, once my decisions were made, there was little that could stop me.

My adrenalin started pumping wildly around my body. I got off the bench and walked slowly towards where the shorter one was standing in front of the mirror finishing a set of bicep curls. His training partner was standing a couple of feet to his side, egging him on to complete his set. As I walked a little sheepishly towards them, trying to give them a deceptive impression that perhaps I was a little scared and intimidated but wanted to use the dumbbells nearby, I noticed him looking at me in the mirror. I didn't know how many repetitions he had left but I could see he was struggling and would probably only have two or three to go. I wanted to time it precisely. As he completed his last rep, dropped the barbell loudly on the floor and stood up I nutted him as hard as I possibly could, dropping him instantly. I then immediately turned to his partner and punched him hard in the side of the head. He also dropped instantly. I grabbed the smallest, lightest dumbbell from the rack, turned back toward knobhead whose hands covered his face trying to stem the flow of blood from his badly broken nose, and smacked him hard against the side of his face, hearing his jaw splinter under the power of the metal. I then stepped back and quickly weighed up the situation to assess whether there was a need to go in again and finish them off. There wasn't. Although I had only punched the taller one once, which probably hurt my hand more than him, I could see he wanted none of it and cowered away. The other arsehole, who thought he was something special, was totally fucked and probably needed an ambulance. I quickly left the gym, leaving them on the floor dirtying the carpet with their blood and snot.

The very last thing I wanted to do was get myself into trouble. My life had changed. I was no longer working the doors I no longer wanted to live a life of violence and aggression, of having to deal with scrotes and scumbags. But I suppose, by default, I will always have to. These two idiots caused their own downfall and I have never (and will never) understand why some people behave the way they do. Why do some individuals believe they are so hard and tough and feel the need to prove it? I was on my own training quietly to myself, why on earth would those two scumbags need to prove that they were harder or tougher than me? Even if I was laughing at them - which I certainly was not - why have such bad, arrogant, superior attitudes?

All that afternoon and evening I waited anxiously on the edge of my sofa for the police to turn up and arrest me. If these two scrotes wanted a war, I thought to myself, I would give them a war to make their eyes water. Had I been arrested I would have obviously denied everything, no-one saw a thing and if it went to court I would have had to make sure that

they were gently persuaded to drop any charges. That night I couldn't sleep, my mind was full of 'what ifs'. Tossing and turning I asked myself time and time again whether I could have handled the situation differently and whether I should have swallowed my pride and ignored them.

The next day I went back to the gym a couple of hours later than usual when it was a lot busier. As I nervously drove into the car-park I had visions of the police sitting en-mass in their cars waiting for me to turn up. The owner of the gym was working that morning and, as I signed in, he quietly asked whether I had had any problems. I looked puzzled: 'problems?' I said. 'What problems?' and shook my head, 'no, not me.'

For about a week I waited for that ominous knock on the door, but it never came. Maybe those arseholes realised the possible consequences of calling the police or maybe they knew that they were indeed in the wrong and shouldn't have said what they had. If that was the case then perhaps they weren't so bad after all. I never saw them training again and a couple of months later I moved on and joined Bodytronics.

As I struggle to understand my anger and rage and my inability to look at situations in a non-violent, non-aggressive way, so do many other people I know who have also spent a lifetime working the doors. It is a sad fact that this world has made me, and others around me, inherently aggressive and intrinsically violent.

One good thing about having been a doorman for most of my life is that it has undoubtedly given me the self-confidence to deal with life on the streets that no other job would have ever given me. I am not easily intimidated, I do not scare easily and I feel I can handle most hostile situations, no matter how unpleasant or how extreme. Where most people recoil and run, I will easily move forward and confront. If someone is out-numbered and getting a good beating I will wade in with fists flying intent on causing some serious harm to those in the wrong. I have no hesitation in disarming any aggressor carrying a bottle, knife or even a gun, and I don't particularly care for my own safety. Pain is only pain and although I hate being hurt, I don't care if I am. I don't actually care if I die; I only care for those very few people around me that might mourn.

Being confident also makes me aware of my own failings and foibles. I know that I am certainly not indestructible and I realise absolutely that there are many much harder, stronger and infinitely better fighters out there, all of whom I hope never to come up against. I also consider myself immensely lucky that, after all these years and all the

situations I have found myself in, I have not had a really severe beating. And I do believe a lot of it is luck, it can only be luck as I have seen many really hard men around me fall. Luck, alongside a complete and utter refusal to be beaten and that I will do anything and everything to that end, even if ultimately I have to kill. But luck runs out for everyone, normally at a most inconvenient and unexpected moment and I don't want my luck to run out in a heap on the floor cowering and pleading for mercy with boots and fists pounding into my skull. Nor do I ever want to end up behind bars having either seriously wounded or killed an opponent, which was one reason why I eventually gave up doing the doors.

People's opinion of me, once they know my background, can be both positive and negative. On the positive side I can get most things done without too many problems and have a forceful way about me that tends to make things happen. I am not a ten-stone wimp who can be walked over; most people quickly realise that when they are dealing with me they have to be accurate and appropriate, or else. Thankfully I rarely get ripped off, and those that try soon realise the error of their ways. I was once taken for a ride with a web-site I wanted designing. I was in Moscow at the time and had chosen the UK based web designer via an advert in an old issue of Exchange and Mart which I bought earlier while I was in the UK. I paid £350 in advance and e-mailed the web-designer all the details for the site. Nothing happened for weeks and weeks, even though I called a number of times and left message upon message. When I had to return to the UK to renew my visa, I went to the address on the original invoice. It was a private house but, as I expected, nobody was at home. I left a brief note through his letterbox explaining what exactly would happen to him and his family if he didn't either refund my money or design the website. A day later he called my mobile apologising profusely and offered to pay the £350 he owed me as well as an extra £50 for my trouble. A few days later it was paid directly into my bank account. However, it would have been no good threatening him if I wasn't ultimately prepared to fulfil those threats. Working the doors has taught me that I could.

On the negative side my circle of friends can be very limiting. I am not ashamed of being a doorman but sometimes I have noticed a physical reaction and a distinct change in the behaviour of those around me once they know my profession and background. I wanted to reserve a place on a local drama course as I have always been interested in acting and the theatre and, since the school plays when I was lead on a couple of

occasions, have always fancied myself as a bit of a performer. But when the lady at the other end of the telephone line asked my occupation, and I replied by telling her I was a doorman, I noticed a distinct hesitation and change in her attitude and voice. Did she think I would turn up and wreak havoc at her class? Or perhaps she thought I was too stupid to learn? Or maybe I would intimidate her other students? People have always been (and will probably always be) very judgemental against doormen; a doorman is a doorman and they are almost always bad. Although I have always tried to portray a good image of door-staff, some people's opinions are unbending and because of this some of the people whom I have made friends with over the past few years do not know of my past - and I have not told them. For various reasons I have deliberately kept what I have done as quiet as possible.

Good And Bad Doormen

I have been asked a great many times what makes a good doorman. In my opinion there are four core traits that separates the good doorman from the bad: objectivity, street-wise wisdom, being safe and being humble.

Being objective can sometimes be extremely difficult especially when dealing with the foolish, the stupid and the drunk. But being a good doorman is about being able to control the situation and people around you, while remaining detached and isolated, although showing good judgement and objectivity is certainly not easy when some drunken arsehole is screaming in your face or spewing up over your shoes. Being objective means being impartial and neutral and basing what is going on around you on fact and not letting your thoughts, feeling and emotions interfere with the job and influence your decisions.

During the early stages of my career in close protection, my colleague Pavao once told me that I must always remain objective and unemotional as once emotion enters the environment I would not be able to work effectively and efficiently. Sentiment would control my actions and reactions which could be extremely dangerous. You cannot react efficiently if you are emotional and this was proved in a recently televised attack on a British security convoy in Iraq. As the security convoy came under fire, the driver panicked and stalled his car. His rehearsed drills were forgotten; no-one in the team seemed to know what to do or where to go and it resulted in two of the team being killed and two others seriously injured. The driver had allowed emotion and fear to control his actions and reactions with catastrophic results, and I believe the same is true with working the doors. Once you become emotionally

involved then good working practices disappear and you could take the wrong decision and do the wrong thing with disastrous consequences.

I always remember a story from my good friend John Brawn. Veteran doorman of some fifteen years, John is no stranger to real world violence. Not only is he a terrific doorman, but having trained with experts like Marcus Wynne and Geoff Thompson, is currently one of Ireland's leading self defence instructors. John punches like nobody I have ever seen punch; the power behind his jabs, crosses, hooks and uppercuts is truly phenomenal, one punch will send you spiralling into unconsciousness. In 1992 he became a Black Belt in Karate Kyokushinkai, in 1993 he become an instructor with the Association and Register of Self Protection Instructors. In 1995 he attained a second Dan Black Belt and is currently the Irish director for several of the world's most advanced self-defence and protection techniques. However, like most truly hard men, John is unassuming and humble and extremely diplomatic. He was educated by the Christian Brothers in Mayo, Southern Ireland, and has a sense of serenity and Christian belief that is hard to imagine coming from such a fucking hard bastard. He told me a story about one Saturday night on the doors at a busy nightclub in his home-town.

‘I am scanning the floor and the entrance to the hall, periodically I make eye-contact with the other doorman at the rear of the hall.’ He recalls. ‘It’s busy and the place is bopping, young men are working hard on and off the dance floor to impress the opposite sex, some of whom are wearing very little indeed. It is tempting to admire the flesh as it jiggles up and down to the Macarena song but I must keep the mind and eye on the job.’

‘Not an easy thing to do,’ I butt in.

He smiles knowingly and continues. ‘Then to my side I glimpse a white shirt as one of my colleagues approaches me from the side to tell me that he and the boys are having trouble on the door with two particularly irritating guys. I give the nod to the man at the rear that I am on the way out, he nods back and I go into the hall to hear the full story. It seems these two idiots have been refused and keep trying to provoke the boys on the door by doing just enough to annoy but not enough to justify calling the cops or taking any action other than repeating to them the fact that they are not coming in. Watching from the back, the trouble-makers keep walking up to the door and engaging the doormen who must bar their way each time. Not only is this pissing off the guys on the door

but these idiots keep getting in the way of innocent paying customers trying to get in.'

'I work myself up into a state and dash for the door arriving at a running pace to the pavement outside. "Right," I shout, "where are these bastards?" Spittle flies from my mouth as I ask the question. I look left and right, my eyes bulging, clearly I am insane. I march up to the two who are now wary of me. All along the two doormen behind play along seeming disinterested as if they have even forgotten the troublemakers altogether. They do not identify the troublemakers to me and do not seem to take an interest but in fact they are watching every move the two idiots make, lest it kick off. "Have ye seen two fellas acting the cunt?" I ask the two troublemakers. "Fucking cunts" I roar. I do not direct my anger at the troublemakers; I only appear to be questioning them. I look up and down the street. The boys look at me then each other and decide retreat is the order of the day. Without comment they shrug and move off. I pretend to look up and down the street some more until they are gone.'

'This method only worked Robin, because I put on a display of rage and the doormen acted disinterested in the events. If they had identified the two to me it would have forced the troublemakers into not losing face and forcing them to square up to us. By leaving me to put on my show there was a chance the troublemakers would not feel too confident and if they did decide to have a go the two doormen were there behind me. As it was they did not fancy taking on an enraged doorman and were happy enough to slink off into the night without seeming to lose face. I call this tactic 'The Walls of Jericho' where if you put on a loud enough and scary enough show the walls of your opposition come tumbling down. It is true to Tzun Su's teaching that the supreme art of war is to win without fighting.'

Without doubt John Brawn is a wise, shrewd doorman that thinks before reacting and who does not let emotion and opinion take control. That particular situation could so easily have got out of control and developed into a bloody mess, but it ended with everyone winning.

'Always, always give troublemakers an "out"' he concluded, 'that is a way to walk away without losing face. Nine times out of ten they will take it and if they don't, that one time is what you spend all that time training for. As Tzun Su teaches; "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."'

Another street-wise hard doorman, whose fearlessness, courage and thoughtful diplomacy was to be admired and respected, was Jimmy. I had first heard about Jimmy after the Millennium night at the Tavern

nightclub in Tottenham. Along with Terry, another confident, hard bastard and owner of various businesses including the well-known Restaurant in Ascot, Jimmy was contracted to provide three security staff to the venue. The hours were from six in the evening until six the following morning and the pay was £800 per person for the shift. It was an opportunity few could sensibly turn down.

When Jimmy turned up for work he, along with three other carefully selected colleagues, were the only white doormen working that night - the other thirteen doormen were black. By midnight 5000 people had passed through the front doors, 4500 of whom were black. Although it was definitely a little uncomfortable for the 'white boys' Jimmy didn't give a fuck, he never gives a fuck.

Half-way through the evening a patrolling black doorman caught a group of four black guys in the exclusive VIP lounge snorting coke blatantly in front of everyone directly off the table. As expected, they arrogantly told the doorman to fuck off and mind his own fucking business. Obviously the doorman was pissed off and, with his coat sleeve, started to sweep the coke off the table and onto the floor, which understandably enraged the coke-snorters. One of them suddenly drew a 9mm from his pocket and pointed it directly at the doorman, who then took his 9mm out from his jacket pocket and pointed it directly at the'coke-snorter'. Noticing the commotion one of the bartenders pressed the emergency call button. Jimmy was first on the scene and immediately placed himself directly in the middle of everyone pointing weapons at each other. Amazingly, although the other guests lounging around in the VIP bar had noticed what was happening and had moved away slightly, no-one panicked. Guns were probably a major part of some of their lives and they had seen it all before. Jimmy didn't give a fuck that he had guns pointing at him and above the music he screamed first to the doorman to back off, which he did, and then turned to the enraged coke-snorter and commanded him to put his gun away, which surprisingly he did. Jimmy knew there would be carnage if he tried to throw them out, so he compromised; they could stay as long as they didn't snort coke openly and in front of everyone. They agreed, said all was cool, everyone shook hands and they settled back into their chairs.

After a long, hard, tiring night somehow word got out that the manager was intending to disappear before the end of the evening and before paying Jimmy and his lads. Extremely pissed off and angry, Jimmy and one other doorman stormed over to the manager's office. As they entered the office they saw two of the biggest, meanest looking

black guys they had ever seen sprawling on a sofa. As Jimmy and the other doorman entered the blacks immediately stood up. Jimmy turned to his colleague and calmly told him to lock the door, which he did. He then turned to the monsters and told them that if they didn't sit down he would kill them. They smiled and silently stood their ground. Jimmy warned them again. 'Sit the fuck down or I will kill you.' Slowly they realised he was for real; Jimmy was indeed insane enough to fulfil his promise. They sat themselves back down.

'Now what's this I hear about you not wanting to pay?' he asked the manager.

The manager paid.

Another friend of mine, Joe, did a few security jobs at a well known popular club in the heart of Birmingham. Apart from occasionally being called in to run the front door when things got particularly hairy with the local Brummie gangsters, at various times he was also asked to protect vast sums of money being transported around the club. He worked with a small team of doormen he knew and trusted. On top of what he was paid working the front-door, he was also offered extra to transport the cash around the club; £100 if he didn't carry a weapon and up to £300 if he did. Joe knew that he was probably one of the hardest men in Birmingham and always chose never to carry any weapons, but the other doormen carried, one used an old 9mm Browning and another an Uzi - his pride and joy - carefully concealed inside his coat. The job was relatively easy and there were never any problems. One Christmas, Joe was brought in to work six nights a week. He was to head the front door as well as transport the cash as and when required. The first two evenings went smoothly but on the third night, as Joe and 'Uzi man' escorted about £7000 through the club to the office, a group of black men brandishing coshes and knives surrounded them. They had obviously been tipped off, either by one of the other doormen or by a member of the management team as no-one else knew when the collections would start or how much money there would be, and that night was a particularly large haul. As they screamed for Joe to hand over the container, 'Uzi man' flapped open his coat revealing his particularly nasty eighteen-inch Uzi mini sub-machine gun. The choice of the Israeli SWAT and the US Secret Service and at over nine hundred rounds a minute the robbers quickly realised they were in a real dilemma. Their faces changed to fear and shock and, like a scene from Keystone Cops, stumbled and fell over themselves trying to flee. The police were never called - it would be tricky explaining what caused a group of thieves to

hesitate and run off. Nobody ever tried to steal money from that club again.

No matter how many years I have spent on the doors and in the nightclub business, it is always possible to learn something new each and every day, and those true, wise, honourable doormen are the ones that we can all learn from.

A good doorman should be able to stand back to look at all sides of the problem or argument and then make decisions based on fact rather than emotion which is why I am the first to admit that I have definitely not always made a good doorman. As I have got older I have noticed that I have become less tolerant and more impatient with arseholes, scumbags and scrotes, and have found myself wanting to teach more and more of them a hard lesson in respect. I lose my temper easily and from time to time have made totally the wrong decisions because I have frequently allowed myself to get too emotional; to get too wound up. Therefore I have made mistakes.

A good doorman must certainly be street-wise and astute. He must thoroughly know and understand the environment in which he works and the conditions he finds himself in. Sadly, over the years I have witnessed many first-rate doormen enter into situations for which they are totally unprepared and the costs have been high. This is especially true for young novice doormen who think they are hard and tough and can handle anything and anyone. Presuming that just because a doorman has experience in one club, he or she can handle another club in different location can be a recipe for disaster. I have occasionally experienced this in some really tough areas of Manchester, where doormen have gone from plush city-centre venues to working the door somewhere in the suburbs and find themselves threatened, intimidated, completely out of their league and in real danger.

Manchester gangsters have recently kept away from the heavily policed and monitored city-centre, tending to concentrate most of their activities within the suburbs. Gangs control the streets within their particular territory, and will probably continue to do so for generations as children born into a gangland and criminal culture know little else and it quickly becomes a world in which they aspire. No matter how hard the police try to infiltrate the gangs and disrupt their activities, Manchester is still notorious gangland territory and an environment which can be extremely intimidating. To oppose a gang without thorough knowledge and proper back-up is suicidal. However, it is possible to work the door in Salford or Moss Side, Cheetham Hill or Longsight but you need

experience and maturity, you need to be well connected and have an understanding of gangland ways, without which you would be an easy target for anyone wanting control of either you or the club in which you work.

Being street-wise is having maturity, experience, knowledge and thoroughly understanding what is going on around you. Being street-wise means being able to effectively read and control your environment and being able to anticipate violent and aggressive behaviour - behaviour that might be disruptive, harmful and dangerous. Any doorman unable to anticipate is a doorman unable to function. To have knowledge means having the ability to survive and this can only be gained with experience and understanding and acceptance.

Of course, fundamental to the job of a doorman is having the ability to offer your customers a safe environment in which to spend the evening. You cannot be a professional doorman unless you have a thorough knowledge of the actual job of keeping your customers safe. Sitting in a classroom learning the theory is a good start, but reality is always very different and each and every venue has set systems, procedures and individual requirements which can only be thoroughly learnt on the job. A doorman requires a comprehensive knowledge of a variety of subjects including the law specific to the licensed environment, health and safety and first aid. A doorman needs to be able to effectively search customers for both drugs and weapons, to identify drugs and be aware of their side effects and contra-indications and to be totally trained in emergency evacuation protocol specific to their venue. All doormen should be shown the building’s evacuation procedures immediately upon employment and at various regular intervals throughout their service. When I first started the working the doors back in the early 80's there were very few standard procedures and rarely any fire drills. Thankfully there were never any major incidents in any of the clubs I have worked, although fires in nightclubs around the world have resulted in a great many deaths and injuries. Back in the eighties we didn’t have the rules and regulations that are around today and we took the blasé attitude that a tragedy will never happen to us. But it did happen at a nightclub in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 13th December 2004 when at least 175 people died and 619 others were injured, and in 1998 at a Swedish nightclub when 63 people were killed and over 250 injured. Fires in nightclubs do occasionally happen and doormen must know how to quickly and efficiently evacuate the building.

A doorman should also be completely loyal to both his colleagues and the venue management. Some situations can literally be life-threatening and the team must know that they can operate together and trust each other, no matter what the situation or circumstance or possible outcome. In my opinion it is better to die loyal than escape as a coward. I have worked with some doormen who conveniently disappear when the going gets tough and others that have been seen legging it as fast as their fat legs can carry them away from a venue where the shit has not only hit the fan, but has been splattered all over the place. I always have fond memories of a venue in Manchester where I was supposedly part of an experienced door-team. I had thrown some big black arsehole out of the club, after he had walked past the door-team without paying in a typically arrogant 'do-you-know-who-I-am' attitude. He was a monster who wasn't stopped until the manager came rushing up to me asking as to why he was let in free. I wasn't responsible for letting him in free but I was responsible for throwing him out. I grabbed him hard by the neck and kept pushing him backwards until he was eventually on his arse on the pavement outside. He certainly wasn't a happy bunny and a few minutes later returned brandishing a large broken wine bottle. As he approached the door the whole door-team made a mad, frantic dash inside the venue while Matt, a nineteen year old student and I went out to confront him. Matt and I were the only members of the team that had the bollocks to face the situation; all the others thought it wiser and safer to hide behind the large wooden door. If the team had stuck together the knobhead with the bottle would have very quickly realised he was out-numbered and over-powered and fucked off. Instead he wanted to have a go. Luckily for him, just as I turned to Matt and said that if he didn't put the bottle down we were going in hard, the police arrived. I have always had immense respect to student Matt who stayed by my side while the other 'so-called' doormen were behind the front door hiding.

It is a fact that every single doorman at some point in their careers will have to counter an aggressive or violent customer and if they can't look after themselves how on earth are they able to look after their customers? Although most instructors on the new SIA Door Supervisor Training courses would disagree, I believe it is absolutely essential that doormen have a high degree of self-defence skill and training. It is suggested that this new era of new-school door-supervisors should use non-aggressive techniques and would therefore have no need for any physical combat skills. This is great for the trainers and lecturers with little or no real-life experience on the doors, who preach in front of a full

classroom of naïve newcomers still anticipating their first door. But the first head-butt, smash of cartilage and spew of blood could very well be the last. My mentor Bob Etchells taught me to thoroughly learn a handful of specific manoeuvres which could then be extended as time passed. Knowing a few good moves in detail gives an impression of experience and capability which can fool even the hardest and confident opponent.

Being safe and being good at the job not only means thoroughly knowing the mechanics of running a door and offering a high standard of security to your customers, staff and management but also means knowing your capabilities and limitations and not believing you are someone you are not, or thinking you are better than you are. Thugs and bullies and egotistical arsehole doormen are not conducive to a safe, trouble free environment. For a doorman I believe that being humble is as equally important as the other traits because if you think you are hard when you are not you are a danger to yourself, your colleagues and everyone around you.

Time and time again I have seen doormen come to a door thinking they are real hard men and great fighters and time and time again these same men are quickly floored or flee at the first sight of extreme violence. I have lost track of the amount of times I have worked with doormen who crap themselves when they realise they are completely out of their depth and in a situation they simply cannot handle. If you boast and brag and pretend to be great, I can almost guarantee you will quickly be brought down to earth and eventually get a really good beating. I have said this before and I will say it again: really hard men never have to boast or brag, they never have to tell others who they are or what they are capable of and they never cause trouble. They know who they are and they know what they are capable of, and for them that is enough.

A brave man will tell you he is scared. A coward won't.

I have many good, dear friends who are, without doubt, some of the hardest men around but in all my years on the doors and around these people I have never once seen any of them either boast and brag or pick on the weak and defenceless. More importantly, they know and understand that perhaps they are not the best, that there is always someone better, faster, harder which is why they almost always remain humble and modest. Everyone hates a loud-mouth, everyone wants to put down a show off, they are targets. But everyone is wary of the quiet and unassuming. Not knowing an opponent's capabilities puts more doubt and fear into the mind of an aggressor than almost anything else.

Many years ago on a close protection training course in Wales I was asked to teach a self-defence class. Probably due to my cooking the previous evening, the regular instructor wasn't feeling too good that morning and so I agreed to fill in for him while he got a few extra hours kip and recovered a bit. At that time I had never actually instructed in self-defense and, although I was quite experienced and fairly knowledgeable in my specific style of Close Quarter Combat, I was nevertheless fairly nervous. The students were from a variety of backgrounds, none of whom, or so I thought, had much martial art or self-defence experience. Because it was my first ever class, I stayed within a basic agenda of teaching a few effective disarming and disabling techniques. The manoeuvres were not at all complicated, but quick and fairly efficient. I thought the class went surprisingly well; everyone seemed to enjoy the lesson and benefited from the techniques taught. Later that afternoon, when I had time to chat to the ill instructor, I learned that one of the students Steve was actually a 4th Dan in full-contact karate and Scottish Boxing Champion. Although significantly superior than I could ever hope to be, throughout the class he remained quiet and unassuming and followed my instructions precisely and he never once mentioned his experience and obvious skills. To this day he remains a wonderfully humble person with immense skill and incredible power who has just recently served two years working alongside former members of the SAS running a major bodyguard team in Iraq.

My Ukrainian friend Sergey is an ex-special forces instructor who is ranked as Grandmaster in his specific style of self-defence, yet he tirelessly works voluntarily in a hospital for the disabled.

Mikhail from Croatia, whom I first met on the front line in Bosnia when he was a member of the Croatian Elite Force, loves nothing more than to spend time playing silly games with his brother's young children.

Peter, an former South Africa mercenary lives peacefully in solitude and enjoys quiet evenings sitting on the veranda doing the Times crossword.

Trigs an former British Special Forces soldier currently runs his own free close-quarter self-defence school for elderly retired women who want to protect themselves against the realities of everyday life. He even pays for the hire of the room from his own pocket.

These are all ruthless, powerful and extremely hard men who are humble, modest, quiet and, more importantly, immensely respectful. These are the sort of people I admire and respect, not the scumbags that boast and brag and show off and pretend to know it all when in reality

they know very little. On the doors and around the world I have met many truly hard men, men whom you could pass in the streets without a second glance yet who are deadly and ruthless and who you would never, ever wish to encounter. Yet none would deliberately start a fight or cause trouble. I wish the world was full of those sorts of people rather than the thieves, murderers and molesters, the muggers and rapists who think of no-one apart from themselves and their short-term gain.

Papworth Hospital

After a bumpy sixty minute ride in the back of the ambulance, I arrived at Papworth Hospital, the cardiac specialist unit for all of East Anglia. Papworth was a lot older and, from my horizontal position being wheeled onto the ward, seemed a lot shabbier than the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. Compared to the Norwich hospital, which opened in November 2001, Papworth's first heart and lung operation was way back in 1960, two years before I was born. According to the NHS website Papworth's purpose is: To provide a cost effective cardiothoracic health care service to meet the changing needs of the population which the hospital serves, which actually meant in reality it only got an overall two-star rating. However the food there got above average marks so that was one consolation, at least I wouldn't die hungry.

I was cheerfully greeted by the obviously Irish cardiologist Dr. O'Sullivan, as well as a male Iranian nurse and a female Filipino and African nurse. In my distress I struggled to understand exactly what the nurses were saying to me. Having shagged my way round most countries of the world I wouldn't consider myself in any way racist, but I was initially thrown off balance by the sudden multi-racial team hovering around me. The only person I could just about understand was the Irish consultant, just.

As Sophie and the paramedic said goodbye she gave my hand a little squeeze. Along with all the other nurses and staff back in Norwich, Sophie was caring and kind and I briefly wondered whether I would receive the same standard of care here at Papworth.

I was quickly diagnosed as having contracted pericarditis. The pericardium is a thin layer of specialised tissue that covers the outer surfaces of the heart. This tissue helps to anchor the heart in place, prevents excessive movement of the heart in the chest when the body position changes and protects the heart from infections and tumours. Inflammation of the pericardium is called pericarditis and it can occur days and sometimes weeks after a heart attack. Thankfully pericarditis is not usually a life-threatening condition. I certainly felt I wasn't going to

die, but my inflammation was severe and incapacitating. I was gently moved from the stretcher onto the bed and then helped forward while Dr. O'Sullivan listened to my chest. The pain was so intense and severe I couldn't even move forward on my own. I was prescribed a strong anti-inflammatory drug, pain killers and a sleeping pill.

The Iranian nurse helped me change into some strange paper underwear and a flimsy gown that tied up at the back. I am sure there must be a good reason but I could never understand why all hospital gowns had to tie at the back. It is virtually impossible to tie up correctly by yourself and therefore you amble about the ward with half your arse on show. Not that I was particularly ashamed of my arse, but I didn't want it on show. The Iranian then held up a Bic razor saying that my groin needed to be shaved. In any other situation, an Arab telling me he was about to shave my groin would have resulted in him spending the rest of his life limping and drooling, but I had been briefed back in Norwich that I would probably need an coronary angiogram and I presumed the groin shaving bit was something to do with the procedure, rather than a nurse's very unusual fetish. I just hoped for his sake I was going to have an angiogram.

An angiogram is a test where a catheter - a long, flexible, hollow plastic tube - is passed into the femoral artery in the groin. This artery is used because it is one of the biggest and easiest to get to, although angiograms are sometimes done from an artery in the arm. The catheter is then passed up the body through the blood vessel and into the correct position in the heart. A dye is then put down the catheter and x-ray pictures are taken of the heart. Hundreds of thousands of angiograms have been done; they are relatively painless, quick and simple and can give a good indication of heart damage. Apparently the first doctor that performed an angiogram did it on himself, although I struggled to visualise him shoving a catheter up his own femoral artery.

Inna arrived with my brother just as I was falling asleep - I wanted to sleep as sleep would take the pain away.

The next day I felt much better and the pain in my chest had almost disappeared. I woke up to see the sun streaming through the window and Inna curled up on the chair next to my bed with a spare pillow under her head and blanket around her shoulders. Actually I wished she hadn't come. Papworth was situated between Cambridge and Bedford and about ninety miles from Norwich and without transport she had no way of getting to and from the hospital and I didn't really want her to sit all day in that awful hospital environment. But she wanted to be with me and

ignored my requests for her to go home. Amazingly Inna continually stayed by my bedside for the following two days.

Once again I found myself connected to the heart monitor above my bed, pissing in a bottle, unable to go anywhere or do anything. I read from cover to cover all the motorcycle magazines Inna could find at the local village shop and every single word of the Daily Mail newspaper. Life in hospital is incredibly dull and incredibly boring; the only things to look forward to are the regular cups of tea and the three more or less edible meals brought by the petite, friendly Filipinos. Having watched my diet and eaten fairly well for most of my life I could never imagine looking forward to hospital food, but in hospital almost everything else is taken away from you and sadly meal times become one of the highlights of the day.

Thankfully for the Arab nurse, the following day I had my angiogram. Leaving Inna sitting next to my bed reading Superbike magazine (maybe she will agree to me buying one), I was wheeled into the operating theatre.

Lying meek and humble on the operating table staring up at everyone staring down at me I felt intimidated and nervous. I knew this procedure was simple, relatively painless and fairly swift but I nevertheless felt overwhelmed and out of control. What the fuck was happening to me and why was I laying in theatre waiting to be operated on? What on earth had I done wrong?

After looking at my groin for a few seconds, the pretty Indian staff nurse told me it had to be shaved a little more. I was expecting to see the Arab, with a weird grin on his face, suddenly appear from over her shoulder, but thankfully he was no-where to be seen. I am sure I would have enjoyed the shaving experience a whole lot more had it just been her and me, it was a shame there were five or six other people in the same room. As soon as she had done her shaving-the-groin duty she disappeared, maybe she rushed off for a good laugh and to tell the rest of Papworth my secrets.

Apart from a weird prodding and pushing sensation, the procedure is a little uncomfortable but, mainly due to the local anaesthetic given at the catheter entry site, relatively painless. The whole process took about thirty to forty minutes. After the procedure was over and the consultant had assessed the results, I was told that there was indeed some minor coronary damage but it was minimal and would not require any further surgery, the small amount of heart disease I had could be managed medically. On the large screen next to where I was laying I was shown a

map of my heart and on it a small lesion in one of the main arteries which may have burst resulting in the heart attack. There was no other major heart disease or damage, everything else seemed absolutely fine and perfectly normal. No other medical procedures would be needed, but I was told that I would probably have to take medication for the rest of my life. I was also told that as long as I had no more chest pain I would be home by the weekend. It was great news.

I was wheeled back to the ward and instructed to lay still for a couple of hours while the puncture wound in the artery healed. Otherwise it would bleed internally and I would have a massive bruise. Inna passed me the plastic cup with juice and a straw and, as I sucked gently, wondered for the hundredth time what the fuck was I doing in a cardiac ward. I hated it in hospital, everyone around me was ill. In the bed opposite me was an elderly man with obvious symptoms of Alzheimer's. Every day, ten times a day, he would call for the nurse and ask her where he was and why was he there and when was he going home. He seemed very well educated and had an upper- class public school accent but even though he could easily recount and remember his days as a top barrister in Hong Kong, the poor soul couldn't remember that he had just spent the past two weeks in hospital having had major open heart surgery. Time and time again he kept asking the nurse about the scar running down the centre of his chest. Although I felt a little sorry for him I also felt annoyed as he moaned and groaned and pissed in his bed. I asked myself why these people slept soundly during the day but at night they screamed and shouted and kept everyone awake?

Some people you meet and instantly like and others you instantly despise. The guy in the bed next to me was affable and cheerful and polite. His pretty and obviously very much younger wife arrived early every morning and spent all day sitting by his side. She even preferred making his bed rather than letting the nurses do it. They sat happily together holding hands and chatting about a whole range of things and in their kindness they even asked if Inna would like to stay at their house rather than spending another night curled up in a chair next to my bed. From time to time I managed to pass a few minutes chatting to them both and learned that his heart had actually arrested - his heart had stopped pumping - and his poor wife had to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) until the ambulance arrived. If she had failed he might have either died or suffered severe brain damage.

I counted myself lucky.

Opposite him was someone I took an instant disliking to. He was a Scouser, had no visitors for the whole time I was there and moaned about everything. On the few occasions I had been to Liverpool, everyone I had met had been warm and friendly, kind and helpful, even though I never understood a word of what was said to me. A real Scouser's accent is harsh and fairly hard and more-or-less incomprehensible to anyone outside the city, but their hospitality more than compensates. But I knew I disliked this Scouser the minute he opened his big fat mouth.

The day after I arrived, just after lunch, I sat quietly with Inna by my side, a bike magazine nestled snugly in my lap and listened to the rude idiot as he demanded to see someone in charge. He was a vegetarian but on that day the trolley had run out of vegetarian dishes. The Filipino catering assistant was very apologetic and offered to go onto the other wards and try to find him something to eat but he angrily declined and decided to go to the canteen and buy his own lunch. When he returned, and after he had noisily scoffed his sandwiches, he insisted on seeing the head nurse. When she arrived he presented her with the receipt and demanded a refund. She explained she couldn't give him a refund, she was a nurse and not in charge of catering and that perhaps he should write a letter to the appropriate department. He then demanded a pen and paper. I thought what an utter knob and was really tempted to unhook myself from the monitor, wander over to his bed, draw the curtains and smack him hard in the mouth. But I felt under the circumstances it wasn't perhaps the best of ideas so I kept my calm, bit my lip, looked down at my magazine and didn't say a thing. I asked myself how the person next to me can be so kind and considerate and helpful and yet another person such an utter twat? Why are some people generous and others greedy and mean? In my rather bizarre imagination I hoped the nurses would somehow muddle up his name and wheel him off for an abortion.

In the far corner of the ward was another fat prat who didn't stop talking about himself and his condition. According to him his heart condition was worse than all of ours put together. He had a huge black and blue bruise covering about two thirds of his leg where the artery had bled after his angiogram. The knobhead walked around the ward virtually naked in just his underwear, hoping we would all comment on his bruise. He was another complete and utter arsehole and all I wanted to do was to wrap his monitor cords tightly around his fat head to shut him up. But I didn't.

Friday afternoon it was confirmed yet again that I could definitely go home Saturday morning. I had never wanted to go home so much in

all my life. I was ecstatic. I couldn't stand being in that place any longer, indeed I needed to go home before I did something to someone I would definitely regret. However, I wasn't allowed to leave until I had seen Dr. O'Sullivan one last time as well as discuss cardiac rehabilitation with a specialist nurse.

I called my mother who agreed to come and pick Inna up later that afternoon. Inna was extremely happy; she had had enough of uncomfortable hospital chairs, incontinent bed wetting patients, loud mouthed Scousers and knobheads with bruises she really didn't want to see. My mother also agreed to return to Papworth the following morning to pick me up.

Saturday morning could not arrive fast enough. I was awake most of the night and I was up, showered and changed before the early morning tea-lady arrived. As I sat in the chair re-reading Superbike for the upteenth time and waiting for my last appointments I wondered if my next hospital visit would be in leathers and crash helmet.

Breakfast came and went and I looked expectantly at everyone entering the ward hoping it would be my final visit before discharge. Finally, Dr. O'Sullivan entered with his entourage of nurses and hangers-on. Before he told me I could get dressed and go home he stressed I must take things very easy and under no circumstances must I go weight-training, not for at least six weeks. Heavy weight-lifting puts a huge amount of pressure on the heart and my heart had been damaged. It needed time to recover. I could walk, swim, and gently cycle but that was all - no heavy weights. I faithfully promised him that I wouldn't go weight-training for at least six weeks. And lastly, he said sternly waving his figure at me, I am to stay off steroids forever. Feeling very embarrassed I nodded meekly.

Epilogue

Getting back home was wonderful. After just a few hours it was hard to imagine that I had just spent the past week in hospital. Almost as soon as I got through the door, and after a nice cup of Twinning's Breakfast tea with one of my favourite Marks and Spencer chocolate chip cookies, I plonked myself into my familiar leather chair at the computer and slowly caught up with all the e-mails I had been sent that week. I then replied to the twelve or so telephone messages and ploughed through the heaps of post. I was amazed how much junk mail had come through the letterbox in just one week. There were stacks of it and it all went in the bin. I was so glad to be home and at my happiest swinging in the chair with the computer humming quietly to itself.

Having a heart attack is not only a painful physical experience but can cause various psychological problems. Although I looked fine and felt fit I was nevertheless a little nervous about doing too much or pushing myself too hard. I was totally puzzled about what I could and could not do. In my head I felt I could do anything but I also knew that I had had a heart attack and perhaps there were things that I was no longer able to do. It seemed so odd.

The second day home I gently walked around the block. It wasn't far and took about thirty minutes. Strangely I felt a little out of breath but I couldn't understand why. A week previously I was in the gym training hard and now I got out of breath walking. It seemed so bizarre.

The third day I walked into the city-centre and back. I felt infinitely better and believed I could have walked the same distance again and again. I felt that there was in fact nothing at all wrong with me and I knew it wouldn't be long before I was back doing what I wanted and leading my normal active, fit life.

The fourth day Inna and I picked up two bicycles my mother and her husband had lent us. We cycled for about thirty minutes.

On the fifth day we cycled to some friends on Cecil Road, about thirty minutes away. Apart from arriving a little hot and flustered I felt absolutely fine, in fact Inna felt more out of breath than me. We had a nice meal, I drank a few glasses of red wine and we cycled home again.

Day six I didn't do anything physical just pottered lazily around the apartment.

Day seven, exactly two weeks after my initial heart attack, I decided, against advice to go to the gym. I knew I was expressly told I should not, under any circumstances, go weight-training but I felt fine and fit and missed the weights. I am what I am and who I am because of the gym. For me weight-training is part of my life and two weeks away from the sounds and smells of the gym seemed like two years. Inna came with me; I trained lightly and carefully, I did a total body workout and felt great.

Day eight was Inna's first day at work. She had managed to find a temporary Christmas job at Marks and Spencer. We woke up early together, Inna got ready for work and I donned my training gear. It was a really cold morning. I walked with Inna to the corner junction, kissed her goodbye and told her I would meet her outside the store at 5.30 that afternoon. I then jumped on my bike and cycled to the gym. I felt good and trained my legs fairly hard, super-setting with shoulders. Although I was getting out of breath quite quickly, I thought it was because I was

training hard, as hard as I had normally trained before my heart attack. After being in hospital for a week I was pale and pasty and wanted to get a little colour back in my cheeks so I booked myself ten minutes on the sunbed. After just three or four minutes something felt terribly wrong. I was trying to catch my breath and I had severe pain again in my chest and down my left arm. With the solarium still running I stumbled out and onto the floor. What the fuck was going on? I struggled to get dressed and left the gym clutching my chest.

This time I knew exactly what it was: I was having a second heart attack.

Special Thanks To

John Brawn whose Power Punches CD is an inspiration to anyone wanting to learn the art of the first strike (www.powerpunches.com) and to Keith - some of your stories from the doors make the mind boggle and eyes water. Thanks also to Caroline who has read and re-read this manuscript time and time again and who must be sick of it by now and to Mark for his patience. Thanks also to all the door-staff and bodyguards who have contributed to this publication and for whom I have great respect. And lastly, a very big ‘thank you’ to my wife Inna who has had to put up with me sitting for hour upon hour in front of the computer. You’re the best.

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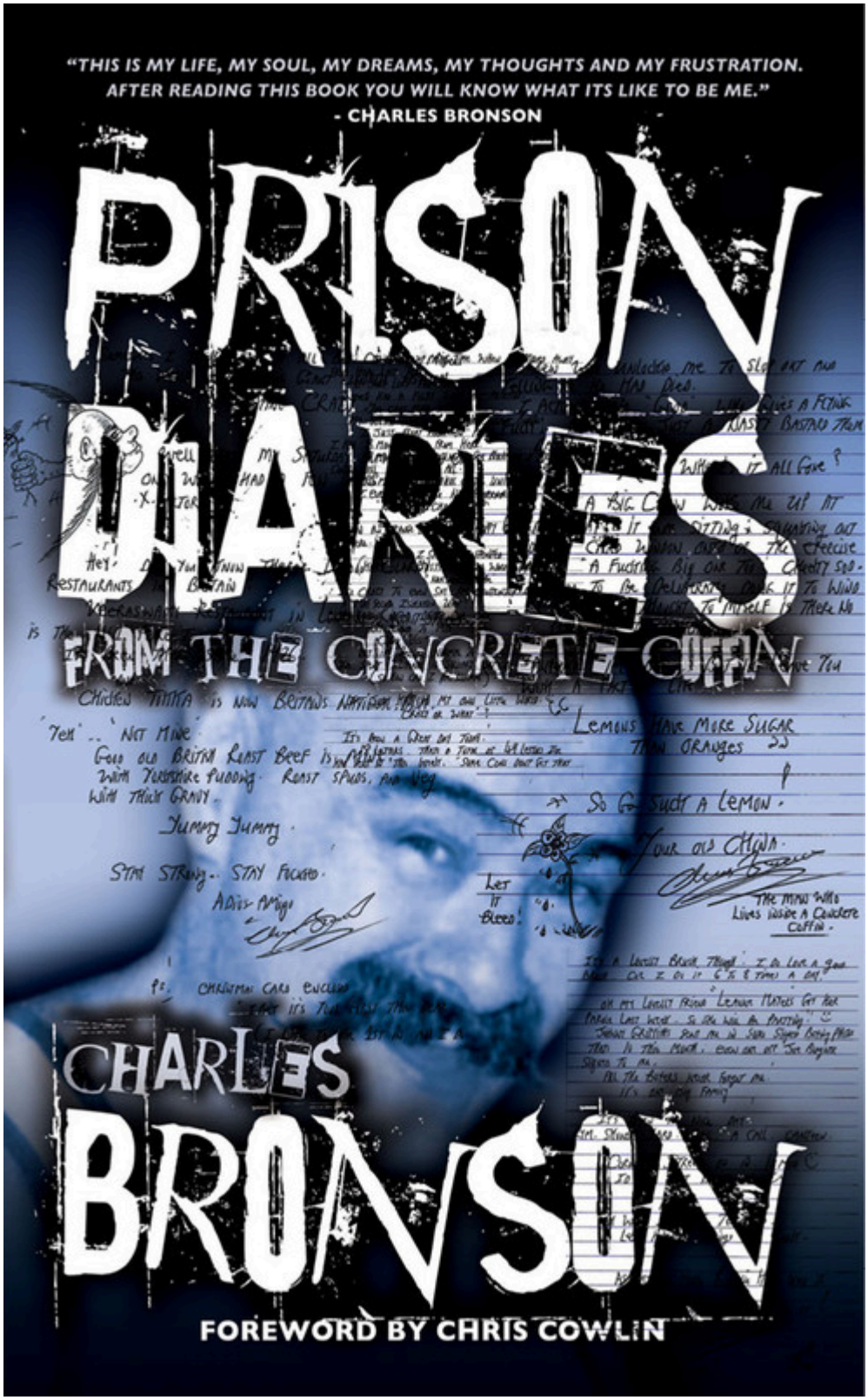
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